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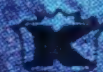


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The Galaxy Awards

The editors of *Galaxy* and *If* are pleased to announce the winners of the 1968 Galaxy Awards for the best stories published in our magazines in the past year. The winning stories were chosen by polling randomly chosen groups of subscribers to both magazines, and their vote was final.

\$1,000 Galaxy Award

Goblin Reservation
by Clifford D. Simak
(Serial, April and June issues of *Galaxy*.)

\$250 Galaxy Award

Slowboat Cargo
by Larry Niven
(Serial, February, March and April Issue of *If*.)

\$100 Galaxy Award

(Due to the closeness of the voting, we are giving three \$100 awards.)

The Man in the Maze, by Robert Silverberg
(Serial, April and May issues of *If*.)

Getting Through University, by Piers Anthony
(Novelette, August issue of *If*.)

The Time Trawlers, by Burt K. Filer
(Short story, August Issue of *Galaxy*.)

Watch for announcement in an early issue of the 1969 Galaxy Awards.

Hugos & Others

If you've been paying attention to what we say up front here over the last few months, you don't need to have this issue explained to you. But we'll explain it anyway. (Actually, we kind of enjoy it.)

Every year, at the World Science Fiction Convention, the assembled science-fiction fans vote to honor their favorite magazine, writers, artists and so on. The award is called a "Hugo" (after the late Hugo Gernsback, who started this whole business of science-fiction magazines some 43 years ago.)

If, we are honored and pleased to say, has carried off the "best magazine" Hugo for the past three years running; and we are celebrating the most recent award with this special issue, containing stories and illos by all the other Hugo winners: Roger Zelazny (who won the 1968 Hugo for Best Novel), Anne McCaffrey and Philip José Farmer (tied for Best Novella), Fritz Leiber (Best

Novelette), Harlan Ellison (who acquired two Hugos this time, Best Story and Best Dramatization), Jack Gaughan (Best Artist), Ted White (Best Fan Author), George H. Scithers (editor of the non-professional magazine that won as Best Fanzine), and George Barr (Best Fan Artist).

It took a bit of doing to get all of these eminences to produce stories in a very short period of time . . . but, as you see, we did it. Or *they* did it. They all came through handsomely, and we're grateful to them — and to the readers whose votes gave us this honor.

Now we've got to get busy and try to win it again. No magazine has ever won *four* straight. Maybe we won't do it either . . . but we're sure going to give it a try.

The Hugos, of course, which were awarded at the Baycon, held in

Berkeley, California over the Labor Day Weekend last year, were for stories and issues published in the year 1967. It'll be some months yet before we know who won what for the material published in 1968.

But meanwhile we have our own voting results to report, for the Galaxy Awards, and that too is a source of considerable pride.

As you'll see by the announcement in this issue, the story that carried away the top prize was Clifford D. Simak's *Goblin Reservation*, published in our companion magazine, *Galaxy*, last summer. The issue was never in doubt; *Goblin Reservation* led by a wide margin on the first scattering of votes that came in on the first balloting, and held that lead in every batch all the way to the end; and we couldn't be more pleased. For Simak is not only a first-rate writer for 1968, he's been a first-rate writer for more years than some of the competition have been alive. Not only that, but he manages to keep a steady production of science fiction coming along in the teeth of a demanding editorial job with a leading Minneapolis daily. Congratulations, Cliff! It couldn't have happened to a nicer guy.

The winner of the number two spot gives us nearly equal pleasure — in a sense, even more, because Larry Niven, as regular readers will remember, started out in *If* with his first published story, only a handful of years ago. His *Slowboat Cargo* (now available in book form from Ballantine under the title *A Gift from Earth*) was as thoroughly in command of the second spot as *Goblin*

Reservation was of first among all the stories published in *If* last year, something more than 70 of them, *Slowboat Cargo* easily led the way.

Number three in the voting was also from *If*, and the author was that most productive of writers, Robert Silverberg. The story was *The Man in the Maze*; and if third place doesn't seem like anything to get terribly excited about, note Silverberg's remarkable feat: Of the top 10 stories in the reader voting, Silverberg had written three — *The Man in the Maze* from *If* and *Nightwings* and *Perris Way* from *Galaxy* — which is exactly two more than anybody else managed to get on that select list.

Fourth, fifth and sixth places were a virtual tie: Burt K. Filer's *The Time Trawlers* (from *Galaxy*) managed to edge out the others by a narrow margin — an admirable showing, considering that it was a short story and all those above it, and most of these immediately below, were either serials or long novelettes; Filer, of course, is also a former "*If* First." Then came *Rogue Star*, by your editor in collaboration with Jack Williamson (disqualified from the cash awards on the grounds of nepotism — sorry, Jack!); and close behind was Piers Anthony's *Getting Through University* . . . both of these last two from *If*.

Thanks to those subscribers who helped us by sending in their ballots on request. It was a lot of fun — so much so that we're going to do it again next year, with more prizes, more ballots — and, we hope, even more good stories to honor!

—THE EDITOR

Down In The Black Gang



by PHILIP JOSÉ FARMER

Illustrated by GAUGHAN

*Earthmen, you are a vital
galactic resource. It's too
bad we have to use you up!*

I

I'm telling you this because I need your love. Just as you need mine, though you don't know it — yet. And because I can't make

love to you as a human makes love to a human.

You'll know why when I've told you everything, told you the true story. The story I first told, that's a lie.

You must know I'm not human, even if I do look just like one. Do humans sweat quicksilver?

You must know I can't make love to you. If you were Subsahara Sue.... But they'll be watching Sue, so I won't dare go near. No, I didn't mean that I prefer her. It's just. . . . I don't want to get into subtleties. Anyway, Sue might turn me in, and, as you can see, I don't trust her, right? And if Sue did turn me in, let me tell you, keelhauling is no fun.

I need love almost as much as I need a hiding place. That's why I'm telling you. You, the first human to know. I need love. And forgiveness. Only, as you'll see . . . never mind . . . I'll tell you all about me, about all of us. I have much explaining to do, and you may hate me.

Don't.

I need love.

The Rooster Rowdy had caused the trouble almost 2500 Earth-years ago.

I didn't know anything about it. None of the crew knew anything about it. You see, communication is instantaneous, but perception is no faster than light.

You don't see? Maybe you will as I go along.

The instruments on The Bridge had indicated nothing and would not for I - don't - want - to - tell - you - how - many - years. If

HUGO WINNER

Philip José Farmer, who was the Guest of Honor at the World Science Fiction convention this year, won the Hugo for his novella "Riders of the Purple Wage." This is Farmer's second Hugo; in 1953 he was awarded the same trophy as the most promising new writer. Once again a science-fiction prophecy has become fact.

The Quartermaster — let's call him The Filamentous Wafer — had not been prowling that particular deck, hunting down ratio fixers, nobody would've known about it until it was too late.

As it was, it still might be too late.

The first I knew of the trouble was when the call came from The Bridge. *Directly.*

"Hello, engine room MWST4! Hello, engine room MWST4!"

Five minutes earlier, the call would not have been able to get through. The electric sparks, microwaves and hot mercury drops — spinning like tops — would have warped transmission. They were flying all over inside our tent. But Subsahara Sue and I couldn't really be blamed for this interference. Although we would have been. Five hundred years had passed since we'd seen each other. Or, for that matter, any of the black gang. Although we both worked in the same continent, my territory was the Berber-Semitic area, and Sue's was where the nickname indicated.

After managing to get permission to have leave together, we'd signed in at a Libyan seaside hotel. We spent most of our time on the beach, inside our tent, which was made of a material to confine the more explosive byproducts of our lovemaking. During that half a millennium, we'd dormantized our attraction — notice I say attraction, not love, if that'll make you feel any better — but, even in dormancy, attraction accumulates a trickle charge and 500 years build up a hell of a lot of static. However, there's a large amount of resistance to overcome, and I'd been oscillating and Sue resonating for hours before our nodes touched.

The tourists on the beach must have wondered where the thunder was coming from on that cloudless day.

Afterwards, Sue and I lay quietly to make sure that no one had been alarmed enough to investigate our tent. We talked about personal matters first, what we'd been doing, our loneliness and so on. Then we talked shop. We chattered about philiac thrust phobiac weight efficiency ratios, toleration tare, grief drag, heliovalves and so on. We started to reminisce about crewmen

Sue said, "Who's in charge of cosmic bleedoff?"

The Intercom bleeped.

"Hello, engine room MWST4!
Hello, engine room MWST4!"

DOWN IN THE BLACK GANG

Groaning, I turned on the intercom, which looked just like a portable TV for the benefit of humans. The "head" and part of the "shoulders" of The First Mate filled most of the screen, and the camera must have been several thousand miles away. Behind him was a small part of The Bridge and a piece of abyss-black shadow edged by a peculiar white light. The Captain's tail.

That was all I cared to see of The Captain at any time. I'll never forget having to look at a closeup of his "mouth" when he chewed me — not literally, thank the stars — in A.H. 45. I have to admit that I deserved that savaging. I was lucky not to get keel-hauled.

Oh, how I goofed up the Mahomet follow-up! The black gangs all over The Ship had to sweat and slave, all leaves canceled, until proper thrust could be generated.

The First Mate, seeing the mercury drip off me, roared, "Mecca Mike! What the bilge have you been doing? You oscillating at a time like this? You sleeping at the post again? You neglecting your duty again?"

"Sir, I'm on leave," I said. "So I couldn't be guilty of neglecting my duty. Besides, sir, I don't know what you mean by *again*. I was never courtmartialed, sir, and..."

"Silence!" he bellowed. Behind him, the tail of The Captain

twitched, and I started to oscillate negatively.

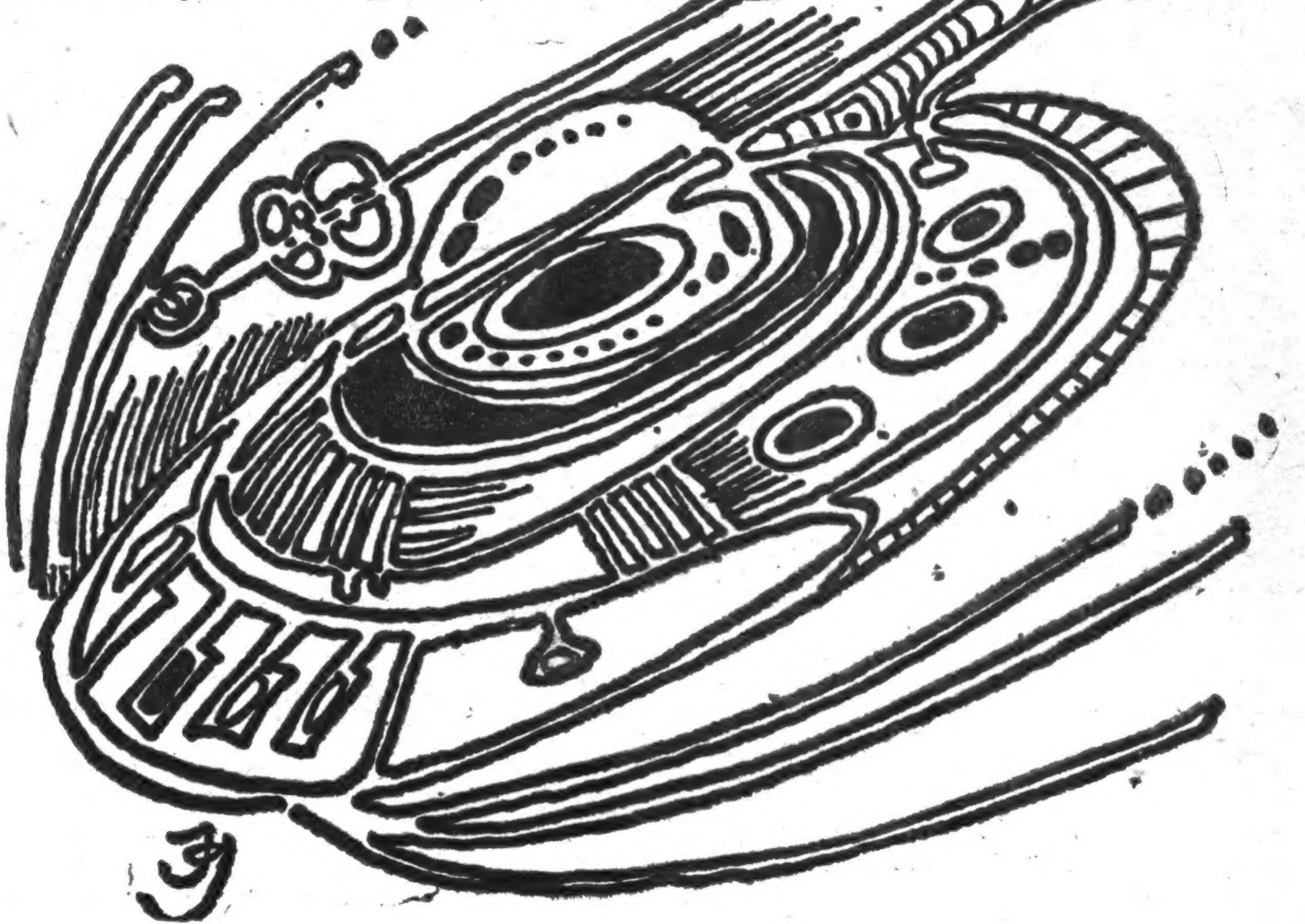
"Why didn't you answer the all-stations alarm?"

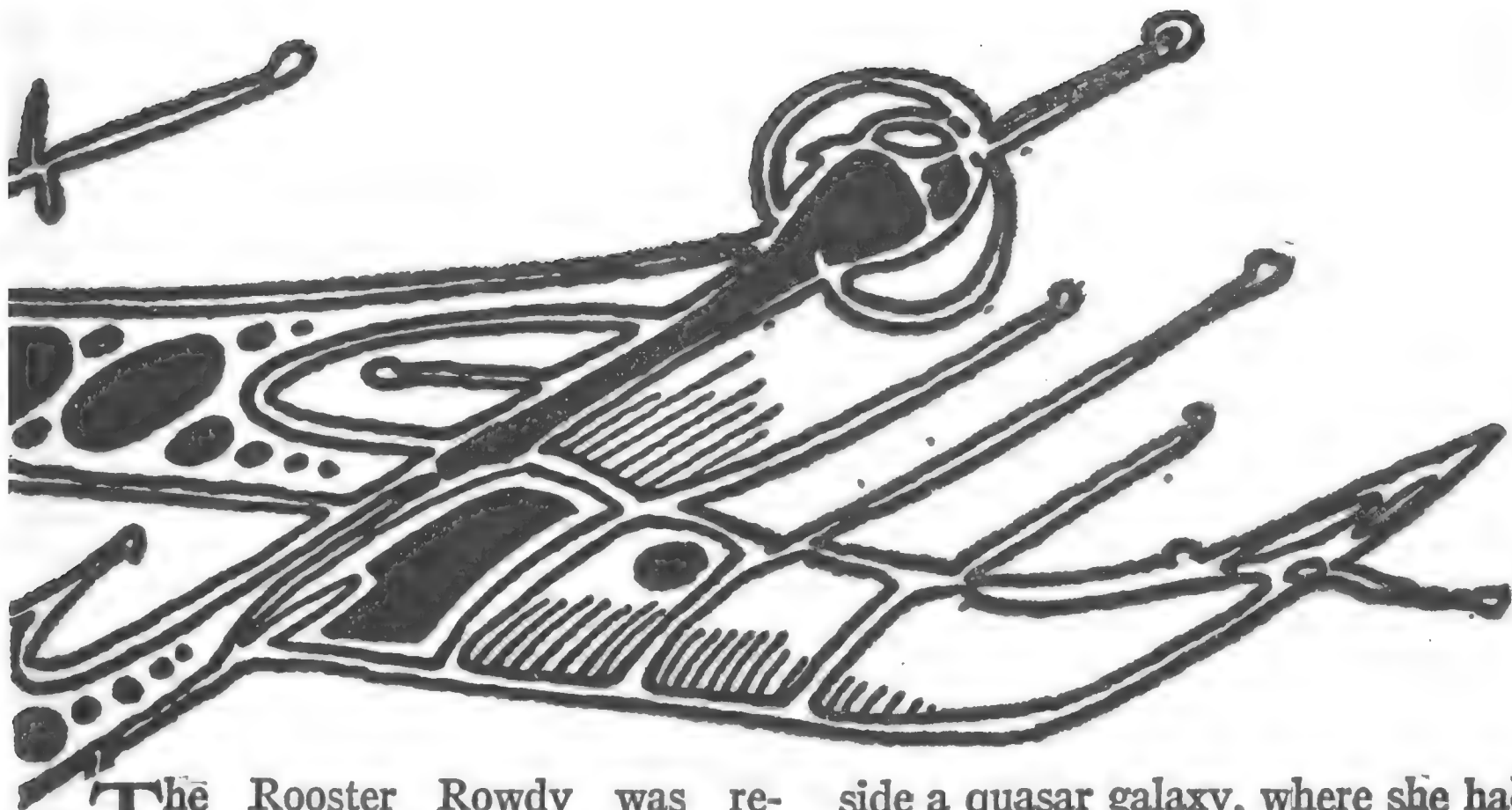
"It didn't get through," I said. I added, weakly, "There must have been too much static and stuff."

The First Mate saw Subsahara Sue behind me, where she was trying to hide. He yelled, "So *there* you are! Why didn't you answer your phone?"

"Sir, I left it in the hotel," Sue said. "Since we'd be together, we decided we'd just take Mike's phone, and —"

"No wonder neither of you has worked up out of the black gang! No more excuses, now! Listen, while I tell you loud and clear!"





The Rooster Rowdy was responsible for the emergency.

I was surprised when I heard The First Mate mention him. Like everybody else, I'd thought he was dead or had run away so far into the lower decks that he'd never be found. Not until The Ship docked. He was one of the ringleaders — in fact, he was The First Mate then — in the Great Mutiny 100,000 Earth-years ago. He was the only one to escape alive after The Captain and his faithfuls mopped up on the mutineers. And the Rooster Rowdy had been running, or hiding, ever since. Or so we thought.

A moment ago, I told you Sue had asked me who was in charge of cosmic bleedoff. I'd been about to tell her that The Crystalline Sexapod was in charge now, when we were interrupted. The Sexapod had her station at that moment in-

side a quasar galaxy, where she had just finished setting the structure of a new heliovalve. The Rooster Rowdy was near enough to sense her, and he came galloping in, galactic light bouncing off the trillion trillion facets of his spinning three-organ body.

The Crystalline Sexapod put up a good fight for her virtue, which was the same thing as her life — I haven't time to go into biological-moral details — but in the process she completed the wreckage of the galaxy and so wrecked the heliovalve, wasting a century and a half of time. She took off for the lower decks, where, for all anybody knew, she might still be running with the Rooster Rowdy hot (2500°F) after her.

Meanwhile, the wrecked heliovalve meant that there was no bleedoff of phobiac drag in that sector. Nor in a quarter of the sec-

tors, since this valve was the master valve in a new setup intended to increase efficiency of bleedoff by 32.7%. And that really messed up our velocity.

Fortunately, The Quartermaster happened to be in the lower decks, where he was hunting ratio fixers. A ratio fixer, I'll explain, is a creature that lives in the interstices between ratios. Thus, it's compelled to be moving on, can't stay in one place long, otherwise it'll lose its foothold and fall. If it stands still very long, one of the quotients — analogous to a human foot — dwindles, and the other expands. The ratio fixer, like any form of life, wants security, so it tries to fix ratios (freeze them). Its efforts to keep from falling messes up proportions and causes The Ship's bulkheads and sometimes even the hull to buckle.

The Ship's shape, size, and mass are in a constant state of flux, but generally controlled flux. And if these are changed without The Bridge finding out about them in time, the vectors of velocity, direction, et cetera are changed.

Using human analogies, ratio fixers might be compared to the rats in a ship. Or, better, to barnacles on a hull. Or maybe to both.

The quartermaster had caught one and was choking it with its filaments when it caught sight of the wrecked heliovalve and of The Rooster Rowdy chasing The Sexa-

pod through a hatchway into the depths. He notified The Bridge at once, and the all-stations alarm went out.

Now I understood why The First Mate was talking directly to me instead of the message being filtered down through sub-to-the-2nd-power officers and petty officers. With this emergency, it would take a long time for an order from The Captain to reach every engine room if it went through normal procedure.

But I had not, of course, understood completely. Or at all. I just thought I did because I was too awed and stunned to be thinking properly.

The Mate thundered, "In the name of The Port! You better not foul this one up!"

"I'll do my best, sir, as always," I said. Then, "Foul what one up, sir?"

"Idiot! Nincompoop! I'm not speaking directly to you just to give you a pep talk! A Thrust Potential has been detected in your engine room!"

"A Thr - Thr - Thrust Po - Po-Potential! In this area? But..."

"Imbecile! Not in *your* area, what is it, the Semitic? But it's your specialty! According to the message, it's in the Southern California area, wherever that is!"

"But what do I have to do with that, sir?"

"Stoker, if we weren't in such a mess and if The Thrust Potential wasn't so promising, and if I didn't have to contact 10,000 other promising TP areas, I'd have you up here on The Bridge and flay you alive! You don't ask questions while I'm talking! Remember that, stoker!"

"Yes, sir," I said, humbly indeed.

The First Mate then became very businesslike. Aside from a few numbskulls, coprolite - heads and other terms, he addressed me as one entrusted with a great task and with the abilities to carry it out. That is, if I had learned anything from experience. He did remind me that I had not only screwed up the Mahomet follow-up, I had blown the whole Ancient Egyptian Monotheist Deal.

"I was called Ikhnaton Ike and Pharaoh Phil by my chief engineer for a long time afterwards."

The First Mate was, however, kind enough to say that I had shown much skill in the follow-up to the Burning Bush Business.

Beware The First Mate when he's kind. I said to myself, "What's he working up to?"

I found out too soon. It was the last thing I'd expected. It was a transfer to the Southern California area and a promotion to engineer, first class.

I was staggered. The chief en-

gineer of this room and several on-engineer's mates and a number of very competent stokers operated in that area. In fact, there were more black gang members there than in any area of Earth.

"The chief engineer's had a breakdown," The First Mate said, although he did not have to explain anything. "He's on his way to sickbay now. This report says there's something about that area that generates psychic collapse. A distortion of psychomagnetic lines of force. However, as you know, or should know, you ignoramus, this kind of field also compensates by generating thrust - potential impulses. The Northeast section of this — what's it called? — U.S.A. has a similar distortion. Both are danger areas for our engines. But, on the other hand, you don't get anything good from a safe neutral area."

"Thanks for the elementary lecture," I said inside my head, which was a safe, though not neutral, place for my retort.

A few minutes later, I had finished saying a sorrowful good-bye to Sue and was checking out of the hotel.

"Why should you be transferred to Beverly Hills, California?" Sue said. "It may be largely Jewish in population, but the citizens are basically English speakers. They don't think Semitically, like your Arabs, Abyssinians and Israeli."

"That's not the only puzzling thing," I said. "The Thrust Potential is non-Semitic. That is, it's not even descended from Semitic speakers."

The engineers and stokers in that area must all have become somewhat unstable, too, otherwise they surely would have been used. So, the thinking of The Bridge was, let's shoot in Mecca Mike. He's fouled up, but he also had some great successes. Perhaps this time he'll come through. He's the best we have, anyway, The Dock preserve us!

The First Mate told me that I had better come through. Or else. . . .

There would be officers watching my work, but they wouldn't interfere unless I was obviously ruining an "engine" beyond repair.

If I came through, if I developed the badly needed Thrust Potential, I'd be promoted. Probably to chief engineer.

The situation for The Ship was much worse than I'd guessed. Otherwise, they'd have let me take an airliner. But orders were to get me to California with utmost speed. I drove into the Libyan countryside during the daylight. At noon the saucer-shaped vehicle landed, picked me up and took off at 30 G. It socked into its base fifty miles west of Phoenix, Arizona, with Air Force jets scrambling

from Luke Field. They neither saw the ship nor the base, of course, and I drove into Phoenix in what looked like a 1965 Buick, and took a plane into Los Angeles.

Coming down over Los Angeles must have been disheartening to the other passengers. They saw the great greenish-gray tentacles, the exhaled poison, hanging over the big complex. I had my special "glasses" on, and what I saw was encouraging, at least momentarily. Down there, in the blackness which is phobic drag, were a dozen fairly large sparks and one huge spark. That big spark, I knew, must be in Beverly Hills.

There, if all went well — it seldom does — was the potential to develop a thrust which, combined with the thrusts in existence and with those being developed on other worlds, would hopefully cancel the drag caused by the wrecking of the bleedoff heliovalve. And so the vitally needed velocity would be ours.

Can anything good come out of Nazareth?

Can anything good be in Beverly Hills?

History has answered the first question. The future would answer the second.

II

I told the taxi driver at the airport to take me to a street

which angled south off of Wilshire between Doheny Drive and Beverly Drive. This was lined with dry-looking maples. The block where the taxi let me off was, in a sense, in the "slums" of Beverly Hills. Relatively speaking, of course. Both sides of the street in this block were occupied by apartment buildings, some only five years old and others about 35 to 25 years old. The apartments in the new buildings rented from \$350 to \$650 a month and so were considered low-rent in Beverly Hills. The apartments in the old buildings averaged about \$135 a month.

My Thrust Potential, my TP, was in the second story of an older building. I had the cab park across the street from it, and I went inside a newer, more expensive apartment building. This had a VACANCY, 1 BDRM, FURN., NO PETS, NO CHILDREN sign on the lawn. I put down three months' rent in cash, which upset Mrs. Klugel, the landlady. She had always dealt in checks. I signed the lease and then went back to the taxi.

My apartment was second-story and fronting the street. It was almost directly across the street from my TP and almost as high as her apartment. I carried my three bags up to it. One was full of clothes, the second full of money, and the third crammed with my equipment. Mrs. Klugel stood in the vestibule. She was a heavy short woman

about 65 with orange-dyed hair, a nose like a cucumber and a clown's mouth. Her black-rimmed eyes widened as I went lightly up the staircase with a huge bag in each hand and one under my arm.

"So you're a strong man in some act already?" she said.

I replied that I was not a strong man, professionally, that is. I was a writer who intended to write a novel about Hollywood.

"So why don't you live in Hollywood?"

"By Hollywood, I mean this whole area around here," I said, sweeping my hand around.

She was such a lonely old lady, she was difficult to get rid of. I said I had work to do, and I would talk to her later. As soon as she shut the door, I readjusted the antigrav belt around my waist under my shirt. My two thousand pounds of dense metal-shot protein would have buckled the floor if I hadn't had the belt operating. Then I took out my equipment and set it up.

I was nervous; quicksilver beaded from me and fell onto the floor. I made a mental note to clean up the stuff before I left the apartment. Mrs. Klugel looked as if she'd snoop around during my absences, and it certainly would be difficult to explain mercury drops on the floor.

The setup for my work was this. Across the street, in the 25-year-

old, rundown building were four apartments. My concern was the upper story on the right side, facing the street. But I soon found out that the apartment just below was also to be intimately involved.

The apartment upstairs was reached by climbing a steep series of steps, carpeted with frayed and faded material. A long hall at the top of the stairs ran the length of the building, ending in a bathroom at its far end.

The back bedroom was occupied by Diana, the 20-year-old, unmarried daughter and her 20-month-old daughter, Pam. The grandparents, Tom and Claudia Bonder, slept in the other bedroom. Tom also did his writing in this room. Claudia was 45 and Tom was 49.

When I looked through the spec-analyzers, via the tap-beam, I saw the baby, Pam, as the bright light I had seen coming in over Los Angeles. She was the big Thrust Potential.

Sometimes, the light was dimmed. Not because its source was weakened. No. It darkened because of the hatred pouring out of the grandfather.

This black cataract was, seemingly, directed mainly at the people in the apartment below. If hatred were water it would have drowned the people below. And, if they were what Tom Bonder said they were, they deserved drowning, if not worse.

Watching that building was like watching the Northern Lights during a meteor shower on the Fourth of July. I ignored the pyrotechnic displays of the tenants on the other side of the building. They had little to do with the "stoking" and the follow-up.

Tom Bonder, ah, there was a splendid spectacle. Although he had been depressed in his youth, at which time he must have radiated heavy-drag black, like smoke from Vesuvius, he had semiconverted his youthful depression into middle-aged anger. Reversed the usual course of psychic events, you might say. Now he looked like Vesuvius in eruption.

Bonder, the grandfather, was determined not to fail as a grandfather just because he had failed as a father, husband, lover, son, teacher, writer — and you name it.

And, truly, he had failed, but not as badly as he thought, or, I should say, desired, since he lusted for defeat. Rage poured out of him day and night, even when, especially when, he was sleeping.

What most infuriated him was the uproar beating upwards day and night from the Festigs downstairs. The Festigs were a father, 40 years old, a mother, 28, and a daughter, Lisa 2. From the time they arose, anywhere from 9:30 to 11:30, until they went to bed, midnight or 1:00, or later, the mother was shouting and bellowing and

singing and clapping her hands sharply and the little girl was screaming with glee but usually wailing or screeching with frustration and anger. The father was silent most of the time; he was like an old sunken Spanish galleon, buried in black silt, with his treasures, his pieces-of-eight and silver ingots and gold crosses, spilled out of a breach in the hull and only occasionally revealed when the currents dredged away some mud.

Oh, he was depressed, depressed, which is to say he was a very angry man indeed. The black heavy stuff flowed from Myron Festig like a Niagara fouled with sewage. But sometimes, out of boredom, as he sat on his chair in the living room, he groaned mightily, and the groan went up and out the windows and into the windows of the apartment upstairs.

And Tom Bond-er would start when he heard the groan and would quit muttering and raging under his breath. He would be silent, as one lion may fall silent for a moment when he hears the roar of another from far away.

The screaming joys and buzz-saw tantrums were enough for the Bonders (not to mention the next-door neighbors) to endure. But the child also had the peculiar habit of stomping her feet if she ran or walked. The sound vibrated up through the walls and the floors and through the bed and into the

pillow-covered ears of Tom Bond-er. Even if he managed to get to sleep, he would be awakened a dozen times by the foot-stompings or by the screams and the bellows.

He would sit up and curse. Sometimes, he would loosen his grip on his fear of violence and would shout out of the window: "Quiet down, down there, you barbarians, illiterate swine! We have to get up early to go to work! We're not on relief, you bloodsucking inconsiderate parasites!"

The reference to *relief*, if nothing, else should have turned Myron Festig's depression into rage, because the Festigs were one of the few people in Beverly Hills living on relief. The relief came from the county welfare and from money borrowed from Mrs. Festig's mother and doctor brothers. Occasionally, Myron sold a cartoon or took a temporary job. But he was very sensitive about the welfare money, and he would have been astounded to learn that the Bonders knew about it. The Bonders, however, had been informed about this by the manager's wife.

Rachel Festig, the wife and mother, was revealed in the analyzer as intermittent flashes of white, which were philiac thrust, with much yellow, that is, deeply repressed rage sublimated as sacrificial or martyred love. And there was the chlorine-gas green of self-poisonous self-worship.

But there was the bright white light of the Bonder baby, Pam. Now that I was near it, I saw it split into two, as a star seen by the naked eye will become a double star in the telescope. The lesser star, as it were, radiated from Lisa Festig. All infants, unless they're born psychotic, have this thrust. Lisa's, unfortunately, was waning, and its brightness would be almost entirely gone in a year or so. Her mother's *love* was extinguishing it in a dozen ways.

But the far brighter white, the almost blinding Thrust Potential, radiated from the Bonder granddaughter. She was a beautiful, strong, healthy, good-humored, intelligent, extremely active, and very loving baby. She was more than enough to cause her grandparents to love her beyond normal grandparental love. But they had reason to especially cherish this baby. She was illegitimate. The father had dropped out of sight in West Venice, not that anybody was looking for him.

Furthermore, both Claudia and Tom felt that they had been psychically distorted by their parents and that they, in turn, had bent their daughter, Thea. But Pam was not going to be fouled up, neurotic, nearneurotic, unhappy, desolate, and so on. At the moment, both the elder Bonders were going to psychoanalysts to get their psy-

ches hammered out straight on the anvil of the couch. Mrs. Bonder was doing fine after years of painful lonely feelings, suicide attempts, hospitalization, and hysterical flights home to her mother. In fact, she was on her way to being the only adult in her family who was aware of her drives and compulsions and able to handle them.

The daughter had her problems, too, including schizophrenic tendencies, guilt, and an Oedipal conflict which kept her from a normal closeness to her father. But neither she nor Mrs. Bonder, though they figured significantly and were to be used by me, had the importance in my plans that Tom Bonder, the grandfather, had.

Why? Because he was an atheist who had never been able to shake himself free of his desire to know a God, a hard-headed pragmatist who lusted for mysticism as an alcoholic lusts for the bottle he has renounced, a scoffer of religions whose eyes became teary whenever he watched the hoakiest, most putridly sentimental *religious* movies on TV with Bing Crosby, Barry Fitzgerald and Humphrey Bogart as priests. This, plus the tiniest spark of what, for a better term, is called pre-TP, and his rage, made me choose him. As a matter of fact, he was the main tool I had for the only plan I had.

Myron needed to be dependent,

to be, at 40, an invertebrate, a waxingly fat invertebrate. Yet he wanted to be a world-famous cartoonist, a picture-satirist of the modern age, especially in its psychic sicknesses. Recently, in a burst of backbone, he had stayed up all night for several weeks, when his family was sleeping, and drawn an entire book of cartoons about group therapy. He knew the subject well, since he was a participant in a group and also had private sessions once a week. Both were paid for by arrangement with the county and his brother-in-law, the doctor.

The cartoon book was published and sold well locally, then the excitement died down and he subsided into a great roll of unbone-stiffened protoplasm. Depression blackened him once more, and he gained a hunger for food instead of fame, and so he ate and swelled.

Tom Bonder worked daytimes as an electronic technician at a space industry plant in Huntington Beach, and evenings and weekends he wrote fast-action private-eye novels for paperback publishers and an occasional paperback western.

He loathed his technician job and wanted to go into full-time fiction writing. However, he was having enough trouble writing part-time now because of the uproar downstairs.--

I used the tap-beam and sight-beam to listen and look into the apartments and also to eavesdrop on Bonder's sessions with the analyst. I knew he ascribed his problems to a too-early and too-harsh toilet training, to a guilt caused by conflict between his childhood curiosity about sex and his parents' harsh repression of it and so on. His main problem throughout most of his life had been a rigid control over himself. He thought himself a coward because he had always avoided violence, but he was finding out in therapy that he feared that he might become too violent and hurt the other person.

Fortunately, he was now getting rid of some of his anger in little daily spurts, but, unfortunately, not swiftly enough.

He was always on the verge of going berserk.

Berserk! That was the key to my "stoking."

The Ship must have been losing speed even worse than we of the crew had been told. About six months after I got into Beverly Hills, I received a call from The First Mate again.

"How's the setup coming along?"

"As well as can be expected," I said. "You know you can't stoke too fast, sir. The engine might overheat or blow."

"I know that, you cabin-boy reject!" he bellowed so loudly that I turned the volume down. Old Mrs. Khugel quite often kept her ear pressed to the tenants' doors.

I said, "I'll use more pressure, sir, but it'll have to be delicately applied. I sure wouldn't want to wreck this little engine. Her nimbus looks as if she could provide enormous thrust, if she's brought along properly."

"Three hours you get," The First Mate said. "Then we have to have 1,000,000^a T units."

Three hours of Ship's time was 30 Earth-years. Even if I got the stoking done quickly, I had a hell of a lot of hard mercury-sweating work in the next 30 years. I promised I'd do my best, and The First Mate said that that had better be better than good enough, and he signed off.

Tom Bonder and Myron Festig were working themselves closer to that condition I'd been working for. The Festig child was stomping her feet and screaming all day and until one in the morning, and the inability to get sleep was putting black circles around Tom Bonder's eyes. And red halos of wrath around him.

Myron Festig was deep in the sludge pit of despond. His latest cartoon had been turned down by *Playboy*. He had just been fired from a job as a cheese salesman. His mother-in-law was threatening

to visit for several months. The car needed new tires. "I'd thinned them down one night." His brother-in-law, the doctor, was needing him because he wasn't making a steady income, aside from welfare payments. And Rachel, his wife, when not chewing him out for his inability to hold a job, was crying that they should have another baby. They needed a son; she would deliver him a boy to make him proud.

The last thing Myron wanted was another mouth to stuff, and, though he dared not say it, another noisy mouth and big heavy feet to distract him from his cartooning.

Tom Bonder would have agreed with this. He was, he told his wife, slowly being herded to suicide or homicide. He could not take much more of this. And more frequently, as if in jest, he would open a drawer in the kitchen and take out a hand-axe, which he had brought out of the Midwest. And he would say, "One more night of thumping from Little Miss Buffalo Stampede, one more night of bellowing 'Myron!' or 'Rachel!', and I go downstairs and chop up the whole swinish bunch!"

His wife and daughter would grin, nervously, and tell him he shouldn't even joke like that.

"I'm fantasizing!" he'd cry. "My headshrinker says it's good therapy



to imagine slaughtering them, very healthy. It relieves the tensions. As long as I can fantasize, I won't take action! But when I can't fantasize, beware! Chop! Chop! Off with their heads! Blood will flow" and he would swing the axe while he grinned.

Sometimes, exasperated beyond endurance, he would stomp his foot on the floor to advise the Festigs that their uproar was intolerable. Sometimes, the Festigs would quiet down for a while. More often, they ignored the hints from above or even increased the volume. And, once, Myron Festig, enraged that anyone should dare to object to his family's activities (and also taking out against the Bonders the rage he felt against himself and his family) slammed his foot angrily against the floor and cried out.

Mr. Bonder, startled at first, then doubly enraged, slammed his foot back. Both men then waited to see what would happen. Nothing, however, followed.

And this and other events or nonevents are difficult to explain. Why didn't Tom Bonder just go down and have a talk with the Festigs? Why didn't he communicate directly, face to face, with words and expressions?

I've watched human beings for a million years (my body was shaped like a ground ape's then), and I still don't know exactly why

they do or don't do certain things.

Bonder's overt problem was communication. Rather, the lack thereof. He kept too rigid a control over himself to talk freely. Which may be why he turned to writing.

He probably did not go down to tell the Festigs how they were disturbing him because, to him, even a little anger meant a greater one would inevitably follow, and he could not endure the thought of this. And so he avoided a direct confrontation.

Yet, he was getting more and more angry every day; his safety valve was stuck, and his boilers were about to blow.

I can tell by your expression what you're thinking. Why don't we build 'engines' which will automatically put out the required thrust?

If this were possible, it would have been done long ago.

The structure of the universe, that is, of The Ship, requires, for reasons unknown to me, that philiac thrust be generated only by sentient beings with free will. Automaton can't love. If love is built into, or programmed into, the automaton, the love means nothing in terms of thrust. It's a pseudolove, and so a pseudothrust results, and this is no thrust at all.

No. Life has to be created on viable planets, and it must evolve until it brings forth a sentient being. And this being may then be

manipulated, pulled and pushed, given suggestions and laws, and so forth. But the blazing white thrust is not easy to come by, and the black drag is always there. It's a hideous problem to solve. And hideous means often have to be used.

And so, obeying my orders, I speeded up the stoking. Far faster than I liked. Fortunately, a number of events occurring about the same time three months later helped me, and everything converged on one day, a Thursday.

The evening before, Myron Festig had gone on the Joseph Beans TV Show to get publicity for his group-therapy cartoon book, although he had been warned not to do so. As a result, he was stingingly insulted by Beans and his doltish audience, was called sick and told that group therapy was a mess of mumbo-jumbo. Myron was smarting severely from the savage putdown.

On the next day, Tom Bonder was 2½ hours late getting home. The motor of his car had burned out. This was the climax to the increasing, almost unendurable, frustration and nerve-shredding caused by the 5-day-a-week 2-hour round-trip from Beverly Hills to Huntington Beach and back on the freeway. In addition, his request for a transfer to the nearby Santa Monica plant was lost somewhere on the great paper highway of inter-

departmental affairs of the astronautics company, and the entire request would have to be initiated again in triplicate.

Two days before, Myron had been fired from another job. He'd made several mistakes in giving change to customers because he was thinking of ideas for cartoons.

Tom Bonder found his wife did not want to listen to his tale of trouble with the car. She had had a setback in therapy and was also upset about some slights her doctor employer had given her.

After tapping in on Myron's account to his wife of how he lost his job, I made an anonymous phone call to the welfare office and told them that Myron Festig had been working without reporting the fact to them. They had called Myron to come down and explain himself.

Myron Festig's brother-in-law, the doctor, wanted part of his loan back. But the Festigs were broke.

Tom Bonder, on coming home, was received with a letter of rejection. The editor to whom he had sent his latest private-eye thriller had turned it down with a number of nasty remarks. Now Bonder wouldn't be able to pay all of next month's bills.

Myron Festig's mother, the day before, had called him and begged him, for the hundredth time, to accept his aged father's offer to become his junior partner in his

business. He should quit being a nogoodnik "artist" who couldn't support his wife and child. Or, for that matter, himself.

Moreover, and this as much as anything sent him skiing out of control on the slopes of despair, his psychiatrist had gone on a two-weeks' vacation in Mexico.

And, that very morning, Myron got word that one of the group in therapy, a lovely young woman whom Myron was becoming very fond of, had lifted the top of her head with a .45 automatic.

Tom Bonder flushed the toilet, and it filled up and ran all over the bathroom floor. Bonder suppressed his desire to yell out obscenities and denunciations of his landlord because he did not want to upset his granddaughter, and he called the plumber. This incident was the latest in a long series of blown fuses in the old and overloaded electrical circuits and the backing of dirty waters in the old and deteriorating plumbing.

Rachel Festig told Myron that he had to get another job and quickly. Or she was going to work, and he could stay home to take care of the child. Myron sat in the big worn easy chair and just looked at her, as if he were an oyster with 5 o'clock shadow and she were a strange fish he was trying to identify. Rachel became hysterical and raved for an hour (I could hear her across the street through my

open window, I didn't need my tap-beam) about the psychic damage to Lisa if her mother left her to go to work. Myron was so silent and unresponsive that she became frightened and left him for a while.

The plumbers finally left. The baby, who had been awakened by their activities, finally went back to sleep. Tom Bonder sat down at his desk in the crowded bedroom to start writing a story for a mystery magazine. If he wrote it quickly enough and the editors did not dawdle reading it, and bought it, and then did not dawdle in sending his money, he might have enough to pay next month's bills. He wrote two paragraphs, using his pencil so that the typewriter wouldn't wake up the baby.

The thumping of Lisa's feet and her screaming as she ran back and forth from room to room disturbed him even more than usual. But he clamped his mental teeth and wrote on.

Then Rachel began to march along behind Lisa, and she sang loudly (she always said she could have been a great singer if she hadn't married Myron), and she clapped her hands, over and over.

It was now 9 PM. The baby stirred in her crib. Then, after some especially heavy crashing of Lisa's feet, Pam cried out. Tom's daughter came into the back bedroom and tried to quiet her down.

Tom Bonder reared up from his

desk his flailing hand scattering papers onto the floor. He stalked into the kitchen and opened a bottom drawer with some difficulty. As usual, it stuck, and he had to get down on his knees and yank at it. This time, he did not mutter something about fixing it someday.

He took out the hand-axe and walked through the front room, hoping his wife would see it.

IV

She curled her lip and said, "Don't be more of an ass than God made you, Tom. You're not scaring anybody with that."

And then, "Why aren't you writing? You said you couldn't talk to me because you had to write."

He glared at her and said nothing. The reasons for his anger were so obvious and justified that she must be deliberately baiting him because of her own turmoiled feelings.

Finally, he grunted, "That menagerie downstairs."

"Well, if you have to fantasize, you don't have to hold that axe. It makes me nervous. Put it away."

He went back into the kitchen. At that moment, I phoned.

His wife said, "Get the phone. If anybody wants me, I'm out to the store. I don't feel like talking to anyone tonight, except you, and you won't talk to me."

Violently, he picked up the phone and said, harshly, "Hello"

I was watching the whole scene directly on the tap-beam, of course, and at the same time was displaying the Festigs' front room on a viewer.

I mimicked Myron Festig's voice. "This is Myron. Would you please be more quiet up there? We can't think with all that noise."

Tom Bonder yelled an obscenity and slammed down the phone. He whirled, ran out into the hall, and charged down the steps with the axe still in his hand.

Rachel and Lisa had stopped their parade, and Myron had risen from his chair at the thunder on the staircase.

I had started to dial the Festig's number as soon as I'd finished with Tom Bonder. The phone rang when Bonder reached the bottom of the steps. Myron, who was closest to the phone, answered.

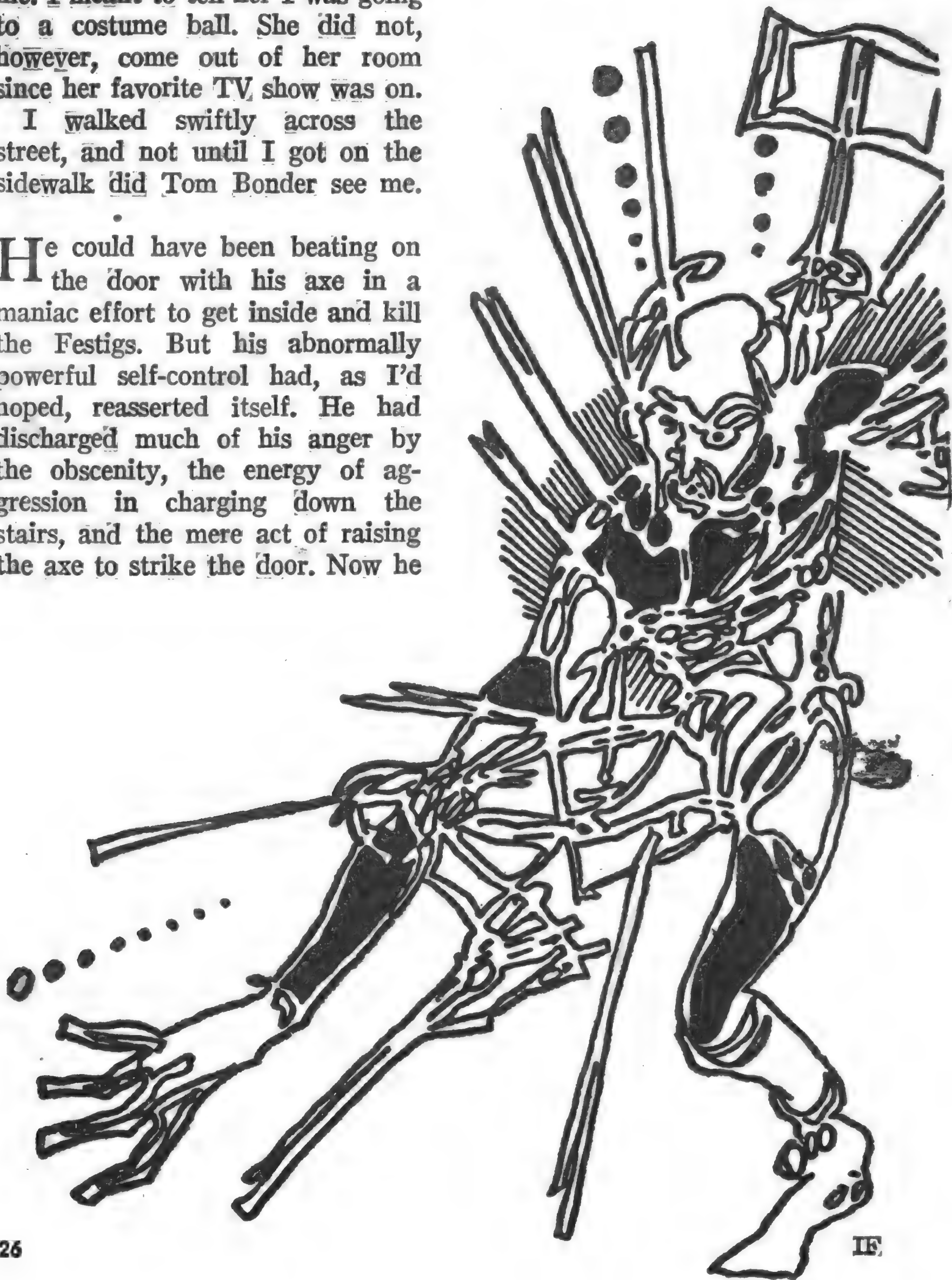
I mimicked the voice of Myron's mother. I said, "Myron! If you don't go into business with your father at once, I'll never ever have anything any more to do with you, my only son, God help me! What did I ever do to deserve a son like you? Don't you love your aged parents?" And I hung up.

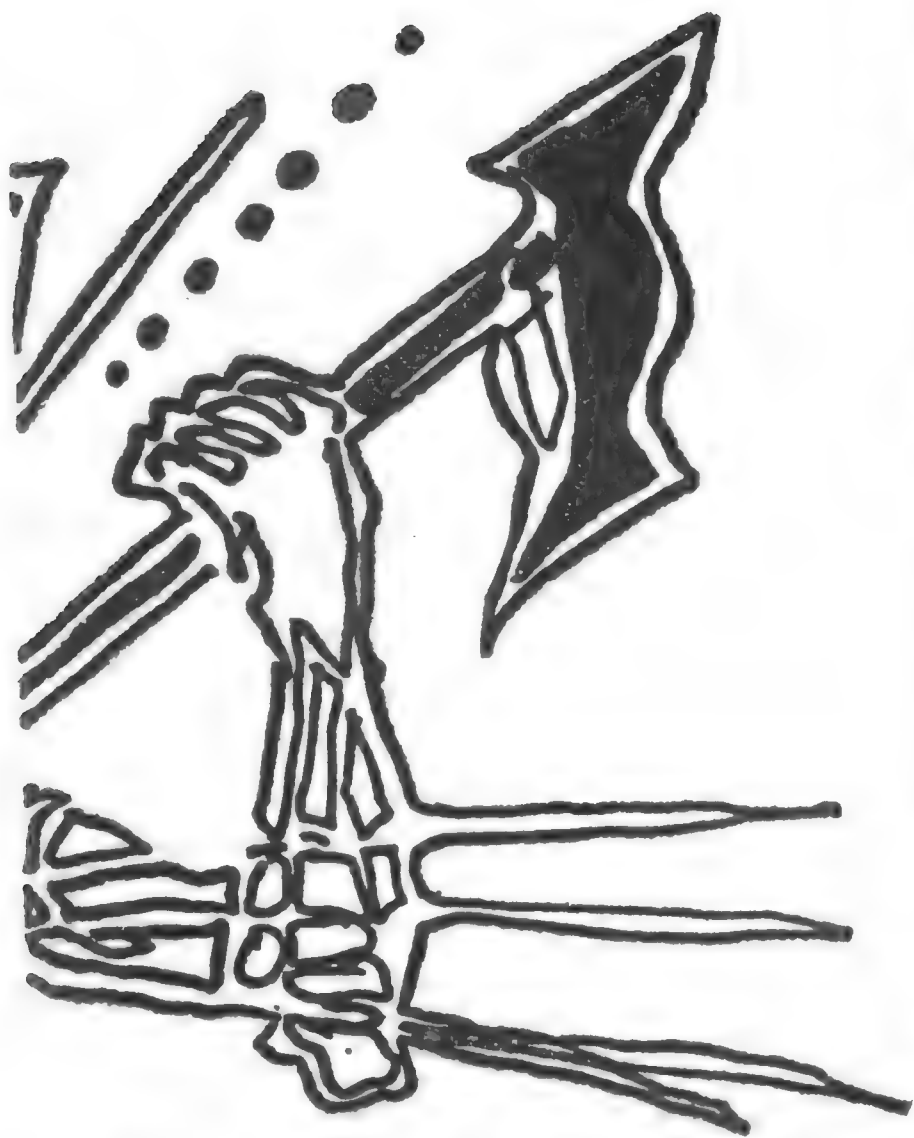
Tom Bonder was standing outside the Festigs' door with the axe raised when I ran out of my apartment building. I was wearing a policeman's uniform, and I was ready

for Mrs. Klugel if she should see me. I meant to tell her I was going to a costume ball. She did not, however, come out of her room since her favorite TV show was on.

I walked swiftly across the street, and not until I got on the sidewalk did Tom Bonder see me.

He could have been beating on the door with his axe in a maniac effort to get inside and kill the Festigs. But his abnormally powerful self-control had, as I'd hoped, reasserted itself. He had discharged much of his anger by the obscenity, the energy of aggression in charging down the stairs, and the mere act of raising the axe to strike the door. Now he





stood like the Tin Woodman when the rain rusted his joints, motionless, his eyes on the door, his right arm in the air with the axe in his hand.

I coughed; he broke loose. He whirled and saw the uniform by the nearby street light. My face was in the shadows.

I said, "Good evening," and started back across the street as if I were going home after work. I heard the door slam and knew that Tom Bonder had run back into his apartment and doubtless was shaking with reaction from his anger and from relief at his narrow escape from being caught in the act by a policeman.

Once in my apartment, I used

the tap beams to observe the situation. Tom Bonder had opened the door and tossed the axe onto the floor in front of the Festigs' door.

It was his obscure way of communicating. *Quit driving me crazy with your swinish uproar, or the next time...*

I'm sure that the dropping of the axe before the Festigs was, at the same time, an offer of peace. *Here is the axe which I have brandished at you. I no longer want it; you may have it.*

And there was a third facet to this seemingly simple but actually complicated gesture, as there is to almost every human gesture. He knew well, from what Rachel had told his daughter, and from what he had observed and heard directly through the windows that Myron was on as high and thin a tightrope as he. So, the flinging down of the axe meant also: *Pick it up and use it.*

Tom Bonder did not realize this consciously, of course.

I had thought that Tom Bonder might do just what he had done. I knew him well enough to chance that he would. If he had acted otherwise, then I would have had to set up another situation.

Myron opened the door; he must have heard the thump of the hatchet and Bonder's steps as he went back up the stairs. He picked it up after staring at it for a full minute and returned to his easy chair.

He sat down and put the axe on his lap. His fat fingers played with the wooden handle and a thumb felt along the edge of the head.

Rachel walked over to him and bent over so her face was only about three inches from his. She shouted at him; her mouth worked and worked.

I didn't know what she was saying because I had shut off the audio of their beam. I was forcing myself to watch, but I didn't want to hear.

This was the first time I had cut off the sound during a stoking. At that moment, I didn't think about what I was doing or why. Later, I knew that this was the first overt reflection of something that had been troubling me for a long long time.

All the elements of the situation (I'm talking about the Festigs, now) had worked together to make Myron do what he did. But the final element, the fuse, was that Rachel looked remarkably like his mother and at that moment was acting and talking remarkably like her.

The black clouds which usually poured out of him had been slowly turning a bright red at their bases. Now the red crept up the clouds, like columns of mercury in a bank of thermometers seen through smoke. Suddenly, the red exploded, shot through the black, overwhelmed the black, dissolved it in

scarlet, and filled the room with a glare.

Myron seemed to come up out of the chair like a missile from its launching pad. He pushed Rachel with one hand so hard that she staggered back halfway across the room, her mouth open, jelled in the middle of whatever she had been screaming.

He stepped forward and swung.

I forced myself to watch as he went towards the child.

When Myron Festig was through with the two, and he took a long time, or so it seemed to me, he ran into the kitchen. A moment later, he came back out of the kitchen door with a huge butcher knife held before him with both hands, the point against his solar plexus. He charged across the room, slammed into the wall and rammed its hilt into the wall and ran the knife through him. The autopsy report was to state that the point had driven into his backbone.

I turned the audio back on then, although I could hear well enough through my apartment window. A siren was whooping some blocks away. The porchlight had been turned on, and the manager, his wife, and juvenile daughter were standing outside the Festigs' door. Presently, the door to the Bonders' apartment opened, and Mrs. Bonder came out. Tom Bonder followed a minute later.

The manager opened the door to the Festigs' apartment. Tom Bonder looked into the front room between the manager and the side of the doorway.

He swayed, then stepped back until he bumped into Mrs. Bonder. The blood was splashed over the walls, the floors, and the furniture. There were even spots of it on the ceiling.

The broken handle of the axe lay in a pool of blood. Its head was buried somewhere.

I turned the beam away from the Festigs and watched Tom Bonder. He was on his knees, his arms dangling, hands spread open stiffly, his head thrown back, and his eyes rolled up. His mouth moved silently.

Then there was a cry. Pam, the baby, had gotten out of her crib and was standing at the top of the steps and looking down at the half-open door to the porch and crying for her mother. Then ran up to her and held her in her arms and soothed her.

At the cry, Tom Bonder shook. No nimbus except the gray of sleep or trance or semiconsciousness had welled from him. But then a finger of white, a slim shaft of brightness, extended from his head. In a minute, he was enveloped in a starry blaze. He was on his feet and taking Mrs. Bonder by the hand and going up the steps. The police

DOWN IN THE BLACK GANG

car stopped before the building. The siren died, but the red light on top of the car kept flashing.

I packed my stuff in my three bags and went out the back entrance. It was now highly probable that Tom Bonder would take the course I had planned. And, since he was a highly imaginative man, he would influence his granddaughter, who, being a Thrust Potential, would naturally incline toward the religious and the mystical. And toward love. And those in charge of her development would see that she came into prominence and then into greatness in later life. And, after the almost inevitable martyrdom, they would bring about the proper followup. Or try to.

They would. I wouldn't.

YOUR POSTMASTER SUGGESTS:

Make Those ~~FASTER~~ Connections



I was through. I had had enough of murder, suffering and bloodshed. A million, many millions, of Festigs haunted me. Somehow, and I know the crewmen and officers say it's impossible, I'd grown a heart. Or had it given to me, in the same way the Tin Woodman got his heart.

I'd had enough. Too much. That is why I deserted and why I've been hiding for all these years. And why I've managed to get three others of the black gang to desert, too.

Now we're being hunted down. The hunters and the hunted and the hunt are not known by

you humans. You engines, so they call you.

But I fled here, and I met you, and I fell in love with you—not in a quite-human way, of course. Now you know who and what I am. But don't turn away. Don't make me leave you.

I love you, even if I can't make love to you.

Help me. Join me, I'm a mutineer, but unlike The Rooster Rowdy, I'm interested in mutinying because of you humans, not because I want to be first, to be The Captain.

We must take over. Somehow, there has to be a better way to run The Ship!

END

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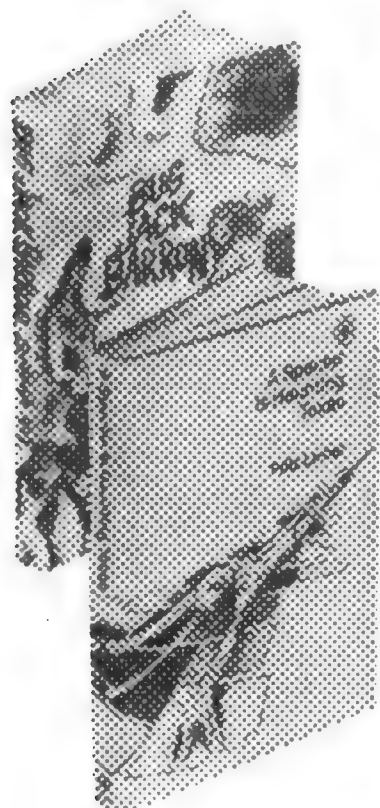
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THE SHIP WHO DISAPPEARED

By Anne McCaffrey

Illustrated by BROCK

*For a Ship to divorce a Pilot,
there must be sufficient reason.
Such as extreme mental cruelty.*

I

“Brain ships don’t disappear,” Helva said in what she hoped was a firm, no-argument tone.

Teron stuck his chin out in a way that caused him to appear a

neckless neanderthal. This mannerism had passed from amusing through annoying to unendurable.

“You heard Central,” Teron replied at his most didactic. “They do disappear because they have disappeared.”

“The fact of disappearance is in-

consistent with shell psychology," Helva retorted, barely managing to restrain herself from shouting at top volume. She had the feeling that she might force him to understand by overwhelming him with sound alone. She knew this was basically illogical but in trying to cope with Teron over the past galactic year, she found she reacted more and more on an emotional rather than a reasonable level.

This partnership was clearly intolerable — she would even go so far as to say, degrading — and she would allow it to continue no longer than it took them to finish this assignment and return to Regulus Base.

Helva had had enough of Teron. She did not care two feathers in a jet-vent if the conclusion wasn't mutual. It had been difficult for her to admit she had found herself in a situation she couldn't adjust to, but she and Teron were clearly incompatible. She would just have to admit to an error of judgment and correct it. It was the only sensible course of action.

Helva groaned inwardly. He was contagious. She was talking more and more as he did.

"Your loyalty is commendable, if, in this instance, misplaced," Teron was saying pompously. "The facts are there. Four brain controlled ships engaged on Central Worlds commissions have disappeared without trace, their accom-

HUGO WINNER

Anne McCaffrey received one of the two Hugos awarded in the novella category for her dragon tale "Weyr Search." She is the first woman ever to receive the coveted Hugo.

panying pilots with them. Fact: a ship can alter its tape, a pilot cannot. Fact: the ships have failed to appear at a scheduled port-of-call. Fact: the ships have failed to appear in the adjacent sectors of space nearest their previous or projected ports-of-call. Therefore, they have disappeared. The ships must have altered the projected journey for no known reason. Therefore the ships are unreliable organisms. This conclusion follows the presented data and is unalterable. Any rational intelligence must admit the validity of that conclusion."

He gave her that irritating smirk she had originally thought a sweet smile.

Helva counted slowly to one thousand by tens. When she spoke again, her voice was under perfect control.

"The presented data is incomplete. It lacks motivation. There is no reason for those four ships to have disappeared for their own purposes. They weren't even badly indebted. Indeed, the DR was within three standard years of solvency." Just as she was, she thought. "Therefore, and on the basis of privileged information

available to *me*..." She came as close as makes no never mind to spitting out the pronoun. "...your conclusion is unacceptable"

"I cannot see what privileged information, if you actually have any," Teron said, awarding her a patronizing smile, "could change my conclusion since Central has also reached it."

There, Helva thought to herself, he had managed to drag in old infallible authority, and that was supposed to stop her in her tapes.

It was useless to argue with him anyway. He was, as Niall Parollan had once accused her of being, stubborn for the wrong reasons. He was also pig-headed, dogmatic, insensitive, regulation-hedged and so narrowly oriented as to prevent any vestige of imagination or intuitive thinking from coloring his mental processes for a micro second.

She oughtn't to have thought of Niall Parollan. It did her temper no good. That officious little pipsqueak had paid her another of his unsolicited, unofficial visits to argue her out of choosing the Ac-thionite.

"He passed his Brawn training on theory credits. He's been slated for garbage runs, not *you*!" Niall Parollan had cried, pacing her main cabin.

"And *you* are not the person who will be his partner. His profile-tape

looks extremely compatible to *me*."

"Use your wits, girl. Just look at him. He's all muscle and no heart, too perfectly good looking to be credible. Christ, he's...he's an android, complete with metal brain-works, programmed in a rarified atmosphere. He'll drive you bat-ty."

"He's a reliable, well-balanced, well-read, well-adjusted..."

"And you're a spiteful tin-plated virgin," snapped Parollan, and for the second time in their acquaintance he charged out of her cabin.

Now Helva had to admit Niall Parollan had been demoralizingly accurate about Brawn Teron of Ac-thion. The only kind thing that could be said about him, in Helva's estimation, was that he was a complete change from any other partner she had had, temporarily or permanently.

And if he called her an unreliable organism once more, she would blow the lock on him.

However, Teron considered he had silenced her with the last telling remark. He seated himself at his pilot control board, flexed his fingers as he always did, and then ran his precious and omnipotent data through the computer, checking their journey tape. It was obvious he was out to thwart any irrational desire Helva might have to change their journey and make them disappear, as the other four ships had.

Teron worked methodically and slowly, his broad brow unwrinkled, his wide-cheeked face serene, his brown eyes never straying from the task at hand.

How under the suns of heaven, did she ever have the incredible lack of insight to pick him? Helva wondered, the adrenalin level in her shell still high. She must have been out of her ever-loving, capsulated mind. Maybe her nutrient fluid was going acid. When she got back to Regulus, she was going to demand an endocrine check. Something was wrong with her.

No, no, no. Helva contradicted herself. There was nothing wrong with her that getting rid of Teron wouldn't cure. He had her doubting her sanity and she knew she was sane or she wouldn't be this ship.

Remember that, Helva, she told herself. It was quite possible that, before this trip ended, he'd have persuaded her she was a menace to Central Worlds Autonomy because her intelligence was so unreliable and the safest thing for the known world would be for her to opt out. Him and his assumption that a brain ship must be an unreliable organism because they/she/he (never it, please) could digest data, ignore the irrelevant and proceed on seemingly illogical courses to logical and highly successful ends — such as the tangle

she and Kira had got into on Alioth.

And to quote particulars, she, Helva, had already been unreliable several times in her short career as a brain ship. Teron had been kind enough to point out these deviations to her, as well as a far more logical course of action under all the same conditions, and he had admonished her never to act outside cut orders while he, Teron of Acthion, was her brawn partner. She was to do nothing, repeat, *nothing*, without clearing first with him and then with Central. An intelligent organism was known by its ability to follow orders without deviation.

"And you actually mean," Helva had remarked laughingly the first time Teron had made this solemn pronouncement — she had still had her sense of humor in those days — "that, if our orders required me to enter an atmosphere my subsequent investigations proved was corrosive to my hull and would result in our deaths, I should follow such orders...to the death, that is."

"Irresponsible orders are not given Central Worlds Ships," Teron replied reprovably.

"Half a league, half a league, Half a league onward . . ."

"I do not understand what half leagues have to do with the principle under discussion," he said coldly.

"I was trying to make a subtle point. I will rephrase."

"In a concise, therefore comprehensible, manner, if you please."

"Orders can be cut without foreknowledge of unavailable but highly relevant facts. Such as the before - mentioned corrosive atmospheres..."

"Hypothetical..."

"... but valid as a case in point. We do, you must admit, often approach relatively unexplored star systems. Therefore, it is entirely possible, not merely hypothetical, that pre-cut orders can require an intelligent and mature re-evaluation which may require what appears to be insubordinate alteration of those same orders and/or rank disobedience to those orders."

Teron had shaken his head, not sadly because Helva was certain he had experienced no deep *human* emotions in his life, but reprovingly.

"I know now why Central Worlds insists on a human pilot as commander of the brain-controlled ships. They are necessary, so necessary when an unreliable organism is nominally in control of so powerful an instrument as this ship."

Helva had sputtered in astonishment at his misconception. She had been about to point out that the pilot control board did not override her. *She* had the override on the pilot.

"There will come a day," Teron had continued inexorably, "when such poor expedients are no longer necessary. Automatic operations will be perfected to such a fine degree that human brains will no longer be needed."

"They use *human beings*," Helva had replied, pronouncing each syllable distinctly to emphasize the fact that the whole body, not the cranium alone, was included. Mechanically controlled ships — even cerebral ships — had proved highly unsatisfactory in performance, especially where initiative might be required.

The brain-brawn combinations were the perfect solution.

"Ah, yes, human beings. Fallible creatures at best, we are, subject to so many pressures, so frail a barque for so great a task." Teron tended to go in for homiletics at the drop of a gauge. "To err is human, to forgive divine." He sighed. "And when this human element, so prone to err, is eliminated, when automation is perfected — ah, there, Helva, is the operative word — when it is *perfected*, there will be no more need for such stop-gap techniques as Central Worlds must presently employ. When that perfection is achieved, ships will be truly reliable." He patted the computer-console patronizingly.

Helva had stifled a monosyllable. Historical and incontrovertible arguments welled up from her school-

ing and conditioning years. These were based, she abruptly realized, on incidents which unfortunately tended to support his peculiar theory of unreliability — however sane the outcome. In each instance, the brain ships had acted by ignoring or revising previous orders as the unusual circumstances they encountered required them to do. By Teron's unswerving logic, intelligence itself — whether shell or mobile — was unreliable. Helva could not see him ever admitting that intelligent conclusions were not always logical.

And right now, every scrap of intelligence, instinct, training, conditioning and reason told Helva that brain ships did not just *disappear*. Not four in a row. Not four in less than a Regular month. One in a hundred years, yes, that was possible, logical and probable. But there was always some hint, some deducible reason. The ship she had discovered on Alioth, for instance, had lost her brawn and had gone psychotic in grief. She disappeared. It had been logically assumed the ship had opted out and buried itself in a sun. The 732 had indeed attempted suicide but missed its mark, dying years later when Helva and her brawn, Kira, had found it.

Why had she allowed Kira to leave her when that assignment was over? Kira would have

been quite of Helva's mind in this matter, but Helva did not see the faintest hope of convincing Teron that multiple disappearances were so preposterous. Because it involved some intuition, of which Teron had none.

How had this didacticism of his escaped Psychprobe? And another thing she had noticed about him, whether he would ever admit it consciously or not: the very concept of cyborgs like Helva was repugnant to Teron. A brawn was very much aware, if the majority of Central Worlds' populations were not, that behind the ship's titanium bulkhead reposed a shell, containing the pituitarily and surgically stunted, inert but complete human body. When Helva had been born physically deformed, into a world of physical perfection, her parents had elected to donate their day-old child to Central Worlds Government. By-passing her damaged nerves, her brain synapses had been linked to the controls of a small jet-propelled shell first, and later to a large, slim, faster-than-light scout ship in the Medical Service of Central Worlds.

Helva and her kind had been so thoroughly conditioned to their shell life that there were not even trace longings to be released from their unusual immolation. Freed of certain purely physical stresses and stimuli, they benefited by possessing curiously sharpened percep-

tions and instincts for inter-human relationships. Complex internal controls gave them sight and sound of inhuman versatility. Helva could project a whisper a furlong from her. She could turn her vision up to a magnification of 100,000 times normal or project it telescopically five hundred miles planetbound — where atmospheric conditions interfered with clarity — or one thousand space miles. Olfactory and tactile senses were translated into atmospheric pressures and compositions, heat-cold tolerances of her ship's skin.

As an avocation, Helva had studied pure voice production to the point where she could sing in any tessitura used by human vocal chords and some exotic variations such as the Reticulan mating croons and the hiss-click percussions of the Ophiuchian spider people. Her unique skill had caused her, in her first tour of duty, to become known as the ship who sings. With the death of her first brawn, Jennan Sahir Silan, her interest in vocal artistry had waned. Now, in this partnership with Teron, she was raising her voice far more in schism than song.

As a matter of fact, Teron had taken such exception to this epithet that she dreaded calling on planets where she had sung. Indeed, he did his best to dehumanize her. Yet he was the one who consistently acted in a mechanical fashion. It was as

if he were determined to live according to pre-set, pre-programmed directives, without allowance for mistake, fatigue or disease.

If he weren't so thoroughly aggravating, she could almost feel sorry for him. And before he had antagonized her, she had actually understood this drive toward perfection which motivated every thought and action. Teron was psychotically afraid of error, of making any mistake because mistake implied failure and failure was inadmissible. If he made no mistakes, he would never be guilty of failure and would be a success.

Well, Helva mused, she was not afraid of making a mistake and she wasn't afraid of admitting failure. And she'd surely made one with Teron. When he started mistrusting shell people, he was no good to her or Central Worlds. Well, she would not be vindictive. She would request a change and take the fine. It wouldn't set her too far back in the red. And with a new partner and a couple of good assignments, she'd still pay-off. But Teron was going off her deck!

The decision of divorce, now subvocalized, made her feel much better.

When Teron woke the next day, he checked as he always did, every gauge, dial and meter, forward and aft. This practice took him most of the morning. A similar

rundown would have taken Helva ten minutes at the outside. By custom and by any other brawn but Teron, the check was left to the brain partner. Wearily Helva had to read back to Teron her findings which he corroborated with his own.

"Shipshape and bristol fashion," he commented as he always did when the results tallied . . . as they always did. Then he seated himself at the pilot console awaiting touch-down on Tania Borealis.

As the TH-824 had had planet-falls on Durrell, Tania Borealis' fourth planet, before, the spaceport was familiar with Teron — familiar with and contemptuous to the point of addressing all remarks to Helva rather than to her brawn. If it complimented Helva, it made Teron harder to deal with later. He responded by being twice as officious and pompous with the port officials and the Health Service Captain to whom their cargo of rare drugs had been assigned. A certain amount of extra precaution was required, considering the nature and potency of the drugs, but it was offensive of Teron to tight-beam back to Central Worlds for a replica of Captain Brandt's ID cube before turning over the invaluable packet to him.

To make matters worse, Niall Parollan, being Section Supervisor, had had to take the call and Helva caught all the nuances in his carefully official words.

Helva seethed inwardly. It would

have to be Parollan. But she had the heretofore unexperienced urge to burst outward from her shell in all directions. Parollan would be unbearably righteous no matter when she filed intent to change brawns. There were three more stops, one at Tania Australis and the two Alula counterparts before she would touch down at Regulus Base. Better let Niall Parollan have his laugh now so he'd be over it by the time she did ditch Teron.

So, girding herself for Parollan's smug reception, Helva flashed a private signal for him to keep the tight-beam open. Teron, slave that he was to protocol, would see Captain Brandt off the ship and to the waiting landcar. She'd have a chance to file her intention then.

"Tower to the TH-824. Permission to board you requested by the Antiolathan Xixon," said Durrell Tower.

"Permission refused," Helva snapped without so much as a glance in Teron's direction.

"Pilot Teron speaking," the brawn interjected forcefully, striding to the console and opening the local channel direct. "What is the purpose of this request?"

"Don't know. The gentlemen are on their way by ground car."

Teron disconnected and glanced out the open airlock. Brandt's car was just passing the oncoming vehicle midfield.

"You have no right to issue orders independently, Helva, when the request has been properly stated."

"Have you ever heard of an Antiolathan Xixon?" Helva demanded. "And isn't this a restricted mission?"

"I am perfectly aware of the nature of our mission and I have never heard of an Antiolathan Xixon. That doesn't mean there isn't one. And, as it sounds religious and one of our prime Service directives is to be respectful to any and all religious orders, we should receive him."

"True enough. But may I remind Pilot Teron that I am his senior in service by some years and that I have access to memory banks, mechanical memory banks, less prone to *lapsus memoriae* than the human mind? And there is no Xixon."

"The request was issued properly," Teron repeated.

"Shouldn't we consult Central first?"

"There are some actions which are indicated without recourse to official sanction."

"Oh, really?"

The groundcar had arrived and the Xixon-people had dutifully requested permission to board. Their arrival meant no chance for Helva to speak privately with Central. She was doubly infuriated by Teron's childish insistence on seeing who-

ever these Xixon were. She knew perfectly well that if *she* had countermanded *his* order, he *would* have been in the right of it to call her down. But since *he* had taken the initiative, naturally it was all in order.

The four men stepped on board, two in plain gray tunics, stepping smartly inside the lock as though the vanguard of a great dignitary. Sidearms hung from their belts and both wore curious cylindrical whistles on neckchains. The third man, gray of hair but vigorous, obsequiously ushered in the fourth, a white-haired man of imposing stature in a long, gray-black robe. He fingered a whistle, larger than the guards' but similar in design, as if it were some kind of sacred talisman.

There was something not at all reassuring, Helva noted, in that obsequious performance. For the gray-haired man, in the action of ushering, was missing no single detail of the cabin's appointments. Just as he switched his direction to put him beside Teron, who was still at the control console, the old man reached the titanium bulkhead behind which Helva resided. The maneuvers were almost completed when something in Helva's mind went wild with alarm.

"Teron, they're imposters," she cried, remembering with sudden hope that the tight-beam to Central Worlds was still open.

The white-haired man lost all trace of formal dignity and, mouth-ing syllables in a frightful cadence, stabbed a finger toward her column.

Helva, in the brief moment before she lost consciousness, saw the two guards blowing on their whistles, the piercing notes sonically jamming the ship's circuitry. She saw Teron slump to the floor of the cabin, felled by the gray-haired man. Then the anesthetic gas the old man had released into her shell overwhelmed her.

Her circuits were out of order, Helva mused. And then she returned to acute awareness.

She saw nothing. She heard nothing. Not so much as a whisper of sound. Not so much as a tiny beam of light.

Helva fought a wave of primeval terror that all but washed her into insanity.

I think so I live, she told herself with all the force of her will. She could think and she could remember, rationally, calmly, what had happened, what could have happened.

The horror of complete isolation from sound and light was a micrometer away from utter domination of her ego. Coldly, dispassionately, Helva reviewed that final, flashing scene of treachery. The entrance of the four men, the arrangement of the two guards and their whistle-ornaments. A supersonic

blast patterned to interfere with her circuitry, to paralyze her defense against the unauthorized activation of her emergency panel. The maneuvering of the third man to overpower Teron.

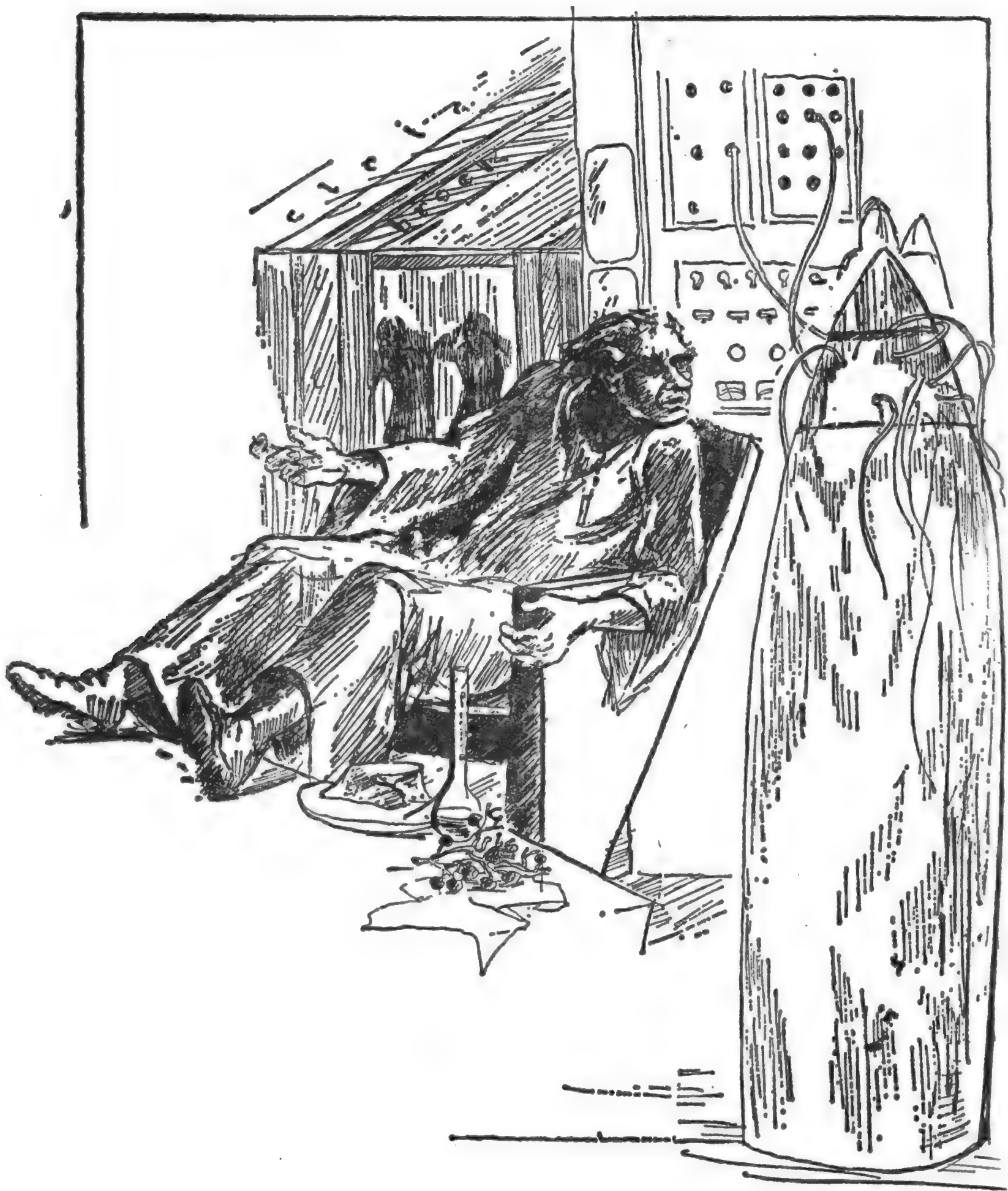
Now, Helva continued inexorably, this attack was engineered to overcome brawn and brain simultaneously. Only someone intimately connected with the Central Worlds would have access to the information needed to vanquish both mobile and immobile units. The release syllables and the proper pitch and cadence at which they must be spoken were highly guarded secrets, usually kept separate. For anyone to have known this information alone was shocking.

Helva's mind leaped to an obvious, but still startling conclusion. She knew now how the four brain ships had disappeared. They had unquestionably been shanghaied in much the same way she had been. But why? And where were the others? Incommunicado like herself? Or driven mad by...

She refused to consider that possibility for herself or any other shell personality.

Constructive thought, fierce concentration, would relieve the present tedium.

The first ship to disappear was the FT-687. They had also been on a drug run, picking up raw material, though, not distributing it. So had the RD-751 and the PF-



699. This line of thought bore possibilities.

The drugs which she had been delivering were available only through application to Central Worlds and were delivered in minute quantities by special teams. A one hundred cc ampoule of Menkalinite could poison the water of an entire planet, rendering its population mindless slaves. A granule of the same drug diluted in a massive protein suspension base would inoculate the inhabitants of several star systems against the virulent encephalitis plagues. Tucanite, a psychedelic compound, was invaluable for psychotherapy in catatonic and autistic cases for it heightened perceptions and awareness of environment. The frail elders of Tucan had revived waning psionic powers with its use. Deadly as these drugs might be in one form, they were essential to millions in another and must be available. The damoclean sword of use and abuse forever swung perilously over the collective head of mankind.

Not even a shell person was sacred from the machinations of a disturbed mind.

Disturbed mind? Helva's thoughts ground down. Where was that idiot brawn of hers right now? Him and his neanderthal attributes — his muscles — would be very useful. She felt a distinct pleasure within herself as she recalled his

being clouted wickedly by the third man. She hoped he was bruised, beaten and bloodied. But at least he could see and hear without amplification . . .

Helva felt every crevass of her mind quivering with the effects of sense deprivation. How long could she keep her mind channeled away from . . .

Two households, alike in dignity . . .

I attempt from Love's fever to fly . . .

Fly, I cannot see. Fly?

The quality of mercy is not strained . .

It droppeth as the gentle rain from . . .

No, not heaven. Portia would do her no good. The Bard had played her false when she had been his sturdy advocate on other shores.

In Injia's sunny clime where I used to spend my time . . .

Time she had too much of or not enough. Could it be that she was suspended midway between time and madness?

*There once was a bishop from
Chicester*

*Who made all the saints in their
niches stir . . .*

She had a niche once, only she was moved out, not by a bishop, but a Xixon. She should sit on a Xixon or fixon a Xixon or Nix on a Xixon or . . .

She could not move. She could not see. She could not hear.

Howlonghowlonghowlonghowlong?
HOW LONG?

When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one country to dissolve the . . .

She was dissolving. There was nothing she could think of in all space and time that did not bring her right back to . . .

SOUND!

A scraping metallic sound. But a sound upon her aural circuits. Like a hot iron in her brain, a fiery brand of sanity after the dense, thick, solid, infinite inquiet soundlessness. She screamed, but having no connections except the aural, screamed soundlessly.

III

Something was thundering: "I have reconnected your sound system!"

Helva tuned the volume rapidly down to an acceptable level. The voice was harsh, whining, nasal, unpleasant, but the sense divinely welcome.

"You have been disconnected from your ship function."

The words made no immediate sense. She was listening to the

glory of sound and the sensation of noise was unbelievable agony. It took a moment for those syllables to re-form themselves into comprehensible tones.

"You have been connected to a limited audio-visual circuit to permit you to retain your sanity. Any abuse of this courtesy will result in further if not permanent, deprivation." A nasty laugh accompanied the threat.

Unexpectedly, sight returned, an evil benison because of the object in her lens. She could not suppress the scream.

"This is your idea of cooperation?" demanded the strident voice; and a huge cavern, spiked with great ivory tusks, opened directly in front of her, pink and red and slimy white.

She adjusted vision hastily, putting the face into normal proportions. It was not a pleasant face, even at proper size. It belonged to the man, no longer disguised as old, who had styled himself the Antio-lathan Xixon.

"Cooperation?" Helva asked, confused.

"Yes, your cooperation or nothing." The Xixon moved his hand to one side of her limited vision, wrapping his fingers around input leads.

"No. I'll go mad," Helva cried, alarmed, frightened.

"Mad?" Her tormentor laughed obscenely. "You've plenty of com-

pany. But you shan't go mad... not yet. I have a use for you."

A finger dominated her lens like a suspended projectile

"No, no, fool, not like that!" Her captor shrieked and dashed off to one side of her screen.

Desperately assembling her wits, Helva tuned up her hearing, sharpened her sight focus. She was facing a small audio-visual amplification panel into which were plugged her leads and those of...yes... she could count twelve other input lines. She had only one line of vision, straight ahead. Directly in front of her, before the panel, were two shells, trailing fine wires like fairy hair from their blunt tops. Within those shells existed two of her peers. There should be two more. She had a peripheral glimpse of more wires.

Carefully, she drew against the power in the amplifier. A very limited capacity. To her left, whence the Xixon thing had gone, was the beginning of a complex interstellar communications unit from the look of it and the few dial readings she could see.

Xixon returned, smiling a mocking, smug smile at her.

"So you are the ship who sings. The Helva obscenity. May I present your fellow obscenities. Of course, Foro's company is limited to groans and howls. We kept him in the dark too long." The Xixon howled with pure spite. "Delia's

not much better, true, but she will speak if spoken to. Tagi and Merl have learned not to talk unless I address them. So shall you. For I have always wanted my own zoo of obscenities and I have them all in you. And you, my latest guest, will cheer my leisure hours with your incomparable voice. Will you not?"

Helva said nothing. She was instantly plunged into utter dark, utter soundlessness.

"He is mad himself. He is doing this to terrify me. I refuse to be terrified by a madman. I will wait. I will be calm," she told herself. "He has a use for me so he will not wait too long before giving me sight and sound again or he will defeat his purpose. I will wait. I will be calm. I will soon have sight and sound again. I will wait. I will be calm but soon, oh soon..."

"There now, my pretty awful, you've had time to reconsider my generosity."

Helva had indeed. She limited her capitulation to a monosyllable. The blessedness of sight and sound could not quite erase the seemingly endless hours of deprivation; yet she knew, from the chronometer on the panel board, that he had shut her off for a scant few minutes. It was frightening to be dependent on this vile beast.

She refined her vision, scanning his eyes closely. There was a faint

but unmistakable tinge of blue to his skin tone which tagged him as either a native of Rho Puppis' three habitable worlds or a Tucanite addict. The latter seemed the more likely. For one thing, she had been carrying Tucanite and she knew the RD had, also.

"Feel like singing now?" His laugh was demonic.

"Sir?" said a tentative and servile voice to her left.

The Xixon turned, frowning at the interruption.

"Well?"

"The cargo of the 834 contained no Menkalite."

"None!" Her captor whirled back to Helva, his eyes blazing. "Where did you squander it?"

"At Tania Australis," she replied, purposefully keeping her voice low.

"Speak up," he screamed at her.

"I'm using all the power you've allowed me. That amplifier doesn't produce much."

"It's not supposed to," the Xixon snapped irritably, his eyes restlessly darting around the room. Suddenly there was his finger obscuring all other objects from her vision. "Tell me, which ship is to deliver Menkalite next?"

"I don't know."

"Speak up."

"I feel that I am shouting already."

"You're not. You're whispering."

"Is this better?"

"Well, I can hear you. Now, tell me, which ship is next to deliver Menkalite?"

"I don't know."

"Will you remember better in darkness?" His laugh echoed hollowly in her skull as he plunged her back into nothingness.

She forced herself to count slowly, second speed, so that she had some reference to time.

He did not keep her out very long. She wanted to scream simply to fill her mind with sound, yet she managed to keep her voice very low.

"Isn't it any better?" he demanded, scowling suspiciously. "I took that Foro obscenity off completely."

Helva steeled herself against the compassion she felt. She comforted herself with the knowledge that Foro had already been mindless.

"For speech, it is sufficient," she said, raising her volume just slightly. She could not use that ploy again, for it would cost Merl or Tagi or Delia what fragile grip they had on sanity.

"Humph. Well, now, see that it does."

He disappeared.

Helva heightened her listening volume. She could hear at least ten different movement patterns beyond her extremely limited vision. From the reverberations of sound, they were in some large but low-

ceilinged natural rock cavern. Now, if the main communications panel, part of which was visible to her, was a standard planetary model, if there were not too many chambers beyond this one to diffuse the sound, and if all the madman's personnel were nearby, she might just be able to do something.

He wanted her to sing, did he?

She waited and she kept calm.

Presently he returned, rubbing absently at his shoulder. Helva increased magnification and noticed the increase of the subcutaneous blue. He used Tucanite, then.

A chair was produced from somewhere for him, and he settled himself. Another disembodied hand provided a table on which a dish of choice foods was set.

"Sing, my pretty obscenity, sing," the mad Xixon commanded, reaching languorously above his head toward her input leads.

Helva complied. She began in the middle of her range, using the most sensuous songs she could remember, augmenting them subtly in bass reflex but keeping the volume tantalizingly low so that he had to crouch forward to hear her.

It got on his nerves and when he peevishly reached out to snatch all but her leads from the board, she begged him not to deprive her peers of sense.

"Surely, sir, you could not, when all you need do is augment my power just slightly from the main

board. Even without their very minute power drain on this amplifier, I could not possibly Reticulate a croon, for instance."

He sat up straight, his eyes flashing with anticipation.

"You can Reticulate the mating croons?"

"Of course," she replied with mild surprise.

He frowned at her, torn between a desire to hear those renowned exotic songs and a very real concern to limit her shell's ability. He was deep in the thrall of the Tucanite now, his senses eager for further stimulation and the lure of the Reticulan croons was too much for him.

He did, however, call over and consult with a fawning technician, who blinked constantly and had a severe tic in one cheek. Fascinated, Helva magnified until she was able to see each muscle fibre jerk.

She was plunged into dark soundlessness and then suddenly felt renewed with the sense of real power against her leads.

"You have ample power now, singer," he told her, his expression vicious with anticipation. "Perform or you will regret it. And do not try any shell games on me, for I have had them seal off all the other circuits on this amplifier. Sing, shipless one, sing for your sight and sound."

She waited until his laughter died.

Even a Reticulan croon could not be heard . . . or be effective . . . above that cackling.

She took an easy one, double-voicing it, treble and counter, testing how much power she could get. It would be enough. And the echo of her lilting croon came back, bouncingly, to reassure her that this installation was not large and was set in natural stone caverns. Very good.

She cut in the overtones, gradually adding bass frequencies but subtly so they seemed just part of the Reticulan croon at first. Even with his heightened sensibilities, he wouldn't realize what she was doing. She augmented the inaudible frequencies.

Her croon was of a particularly compelling variation, and she heard, under her singing — if one would permit Reticulan croons such a dignified title — the stealthy advance of his slaves and co-workers, lured close by the irresistible siren sounds.

She gathered herself and then pumped pure sonic hell into the triple note.

It got him first, heightened as he had been by the Tucanite. It got him dead, his brain irretrievably scrambled from the massive dose of sonic fury. It got the others in the cavern, too. She could hear their shrieks of despair over the weird composite sound she had created, as they fainted.

The overload shortcircuited several panels in the master board, showering the unconscious and the dead with blinding sparks. Helva threw in what breakers she could to keep her own now reduced circuit open.

But even she felt the backlash of that supersonic blast. Her nerve ends tingled, her hearing rang and she suddenly felt extremely enervated.

"I'll bet I've developed a *very* acid condition in my nutrients," she told herself with a bit of graveyard humor.

The great room was silent except for hoarse breathing and hissing wires.

"Delia? Answer me. It's Helva."

"Who is Helva? I have no access to memory banks."

"Tagi, can you hear me?"

"Yes." A flat, mechanical affirmative.

"Merl, can you hear me?"

"You're loud."

Helva stared straight ahead at the dead body that had tortured them so cruelly. Oh, for a pair of hands!

Revenge on an inert husk was illogical.

Now what do I do? she wondered.

At that point she remembered that she had been about to divorce Teron. *And the tight-beam had been left open?* Parollan wasn't the kind to sit on his hands. Where was he?

“There you are, Helva, back at the old stand,” the ST-1 Captain said, patting her column paternally.

She scanned to make certain the release plate was locked back into seamless congruity with the rest of the column.

“Your new cadence-syllable release was tuned into the metal, and Chief Raily is the only one who knows it,” the Captain assured her.

“And the independent audio and visual relays are attached to the spare synapses on my shell?”

“Good idea, that, Helva. May make it a standard procedure.”

“But mine are hooked up?”

“Yes, yours are hooked up. Seems like a case of asking for clearance when the ship has blasted off, this precaution after the fact, but...”

“Have you ever been sense-deprived, Captain?”

He shuddered and his eyes darkened. None of the Fleet or Brain-Brawn Ship personnel who penetrated the Xixon’s asteroid headquarters would be likely to forget the pitiable condition of the shell people: the amplified human beings who had once been considered invulnerable.

“Tagi, Merl and Delia will recover. Delia will be back in service in a year or so,” the Captain said quietly. Then he sighed, for he couldn’t bring himself to name

Foro either. “You people are needed, you know.” He leaned forward so suddenly, toward her panel, that Helva gasped. “Easy, Helva.” And he slid his hand down the column. “Nope. Can’t even feel the seam. You’re all secure.”

He carefully gathered up the delicate instruments of his profession, wrapping them in soft, spongy surgi-foam.

“How are the brawns?” she asked idly, as she stretched out along her rewired extensions, shrugging into her ship skin.

“Well, Delia’s Rife will pull out of Menkalite addiction. He’d only had the one dose. They’ve still to track down the other two ships but I expect all the brawns will survive.”

His expression altered abruptly as if he had caught an unpleasant smell. “Why did you have your tight-beam channel open, Helva? When we got that brawn of yours out of his padded cell, he was furious that you could disregard proper procedure in such a fashion.” The Captain managed to sound like Teron for a moment. “Why, if you hadn’t, and Cencom hadn’t heard the whole damned thing.... How come you left the channel open?”

“I’d rather not say, but since you’ve met Teron, you might do a little guessing.”

“Huh? Well, whatever the reason, it saved your life.”

“It took ’em long enough.”

The Captain laughed at her sour complaint. "Don't forget, you'd been cleared so your kidnappers just lifted off Durrell before your supervisor could stop them. But Parollan scorched the ears of every operator in frequency range getting Fleet ships after you. At that, with a whole sector to comb, and the drug runners using this asteroid off Borealis as a hideout, too close to Durrell to be even a probability, it took a little time."

"That Xixon thing was smart-mad, hiding right out in sight."

"Well, he had a high intelligence factor," the Captain admitted. "After all, he made it into brawn training twenty-odd years ago."

That had been an unnerving development, Helva reflected. If he'd actually qualified and then developed neural maladjustments ... He had taken enough Tucanite to break the deconditioning mind blocks—another matter that was going to be re-evaluated by Central Worlds as a result of this incident—and had managed to insinuate himself in maintenance crews on Regulus Base, laying the groundwork for his operation by the judicious use of addictive drugs on key employees. Then, using Central World brain ships with drugged brawns under his control, he could have landed anywhere including Regulus Base.

"I'll be off now," the Captain said, saluting her respectfully. "Let

your own brawn take over now."

"Not if I can help it," Helva amended.

Whatever bond of loyalty she had once had for Teron had dissolved as surely as she had been parted from her security. Teron, having decided that he was hopelessly incarcerated, had stolidly composed himself to await the worst with calm dignity ... as any logical man ought to do.

On anyone else's tapes—including the captain's, to judge by the expression on his face—such logic was cowardice; and that was Helva's unalterable conclusion. Although she would grant that his behavior had been consistent.

Delia's Rife, on the other hand, had tried to break out. He had clawed a foothold in the padded fabric of his cell, lacerating hands and feet in the attempt to reach the ceiling access hatch. Dizzy from a Menkalite injection, confused and weak from starvation intended to allow the Menkalite to work unhindered in his system, he had actually crawled as far as the airlock when the rescue group had arrived.

Helva let the ST-1 down the personnel lift and ran a thorough but hasty flip-check of herself, scanners, sensory meters, power-pile drive chamber, inventory. It was like revisiting a forgotten treasury of mino-miracles. Helva wondered if she had ever before appreciated the versatility incorporated in her ship body,

had really valued the power she had at her disposition, or cherished the ingenuity of her engineers. Oh, it was good to be back together again.

“Helva?” a low voice spoke tentatively. “Are you alone now?” It was Central Worlds on the tight-beam.

“Yes. The ST-1 has just left. You can probably reach him...”

“Shove him.” Then Helva recognized that the hoarse voice must belong to Niall Parollan. “I just wanted to know you were back where you belong. You’re sure you are all right, Helva?”

Niall Parollan laryngitic with concern?

Helva was flattered and surprised, considering the unflattering description of her he’d hurled at her at their last parting.

“I’m intact again, if that’s what you mean, Parollan,” she replied in droll good humor.

She could have sworn she heard a sigh over the tight-beam.

“That’s my girl.” Parollan laughed, so it must have been a wheeze she’d heard. “Of course, if you hadn’t had your synapses scrambled on Beta Corvi, you’d have listened to me when I tried to tell you that that simple simian Acthionite was a regulation-bound brass...”

“Not brass, Niall,” Helva interrupted sharply, “not brass. Brass is a metal, and Teron had none.”

“Oh ho ho, so you admit I was right about him?”

“To err is human...”

“Thank God!”

Just then Teron requested permission to board.

“I’ll see you later, Helva. I couldn’t stomach...”

“Don’t go, Parollan...”

“Helva, my own true love, I’ve been glued to this tight-beam for three days for your sake, and the stimutabs have worn off. I’m dead in the seat!”

“Prop your eyelids open for a few moments more, Niall. This will be official,” she urged Parollan as she activated the personnel lift for Teron. She felt a cold dislike replace the bantering friendliness she had been enjoying.

Big as life and disgustingly neanderthalic, her brawn strode into the main control room, saluting with scant ceremony toward her bulkhead. Strode? He swaggered, Helva thought angrily, looking not the least bit worse for his absence.

Teron rubbed his hands together, sat himself down in the pilot’s chair, flexed his fingers before he poised them, very business-like, over the computer keyboard.

“I’ll just run a thorough check-down to be sure no damage was done.”

His words were neither request nor order.

“Just like that, huh?” Helva asked in a dangerously quiet voice.



Teron frowned and slewed round in the chair toward her panel.

"Our schedule has been interrupted enough with this mishap."

"Mishap?"

"Modulate your tone, Helva. You can't expect to use those tricks on *me*."

"I can't expect what?"

"Now," he began placatingly, jerking his chin down, "I take into consideration you've been under a strain recently. You should have insisted that I oversee that ST-1 Captain during that installation. You might have sustained some circuit damage, you know."

"How kind of you to consider that possibility," she said. That was it!

"You could scarcely be harmed, physically, contained as you are in pure titanium," he pointed out.

"Teron of Acthion, all I can say at this point is that it's a damned good thing for you that I am contained behind pure titanium. Because if I were mobile, I would kick you down that shaft so fast..."

"What has possessed you?"

For once, sheer blank illogical amazement flashed across Teron's face.

"Get out! Get off my deck! Get out of my sight. Get OUT!" Helva roared, pouring on volume with each word, with no regard for the tender structure of the human ear.

With sheer sound she drove him, hands clapped to the sides of his

head, off the deck, down the side of the 824 as fast as she could escalate the lift.

"Take me for granted, will you? Unreliable organism, am I? Illogical, irresponsible, and inhuman..." Helva bellowed after him in a planet-sized shout. And then she burst out laughing as she realized that such emotional behavior on her part was the only way she could have routed the over-logical Teron of Acthion.

"Did you hear that, Niall Parollan?" she demanded in a reasonable but nevertheless exultant tone. "Niall? Hey, Cencom, you on the tight-beam . . . answer me?"

From the open channel came the shuddering discord of a massive adenoidal snore.

"Niall?"

The sleeper wheezed on, oblivious, until Helva chuckled at this additional evidence of human frailty.

She asked and received clearance from the asteroid's half-ruined spaceport. She was going to have a long chat with Chief Raily.

Her penalty for divorcing Teron would be a speck against the finders' fee for four shanghaied BB ships. And there ought to be a Federation bonus for aid in the apprehension of drug runners. Totalled if true justice was given half a chance, the rewards might just make her a free ship, out of debt, truly her own mistress. The thought was enough to set her singing. **END**

The Frozen Summer

by DAVID REDD

Illustrated by FINLAY

*Man's ancient glory was gone, buried
under the Ice, save where the Goddess
held even Summer her eternal prisoner*

I

Vel Senna uncorked the speaking tube to the control room.
"Captain Zing?"

"Speaking, sir."

"Do you see the valley?"

There was a pause. Vel Senna tapped his long purple fingers impatiently against the tube. Surely everyone on the airship had seen

the valley by now. It was a long green scar on the smooth white icefield below. Even a human could hardly miss it.

"The valley is approximately three miles away, bearing two nine five degrees," said Captain Zing. "We are altering course towards it. The ice appears suitable for landing."

"Good," said Vel Senna. "Choose

a safe landing place not less than half a mile from the valley. Take the ship down as soon as you can."

Vel Senna plugged the speaking tube. The captain was reliable enough, for a native. He could be trusted to keep the airship a reasonable distance from the valley.

Krau Sara was at the window of their observation room, studying the valley through a native-made telescope. He glanced up as Vel Senna joined him. "Aren't we landing inside the valley?"

"Certainly not," said Vel Senna. "Remember the priest's warning!"

"Perhaps it's for the best. I doubt whether we could land among those trees." Krau Sara passed him the telescope. "Take a look."

Vel Senna accepted the telescope. He was a muscular centauroid being, with purple hide and a single multi-faceted eye. He needed no clothing, but his three-fingered hands bore several jewelled rings. Those powerful hands held the telescope with a surprising delicacy.

He and Krau Sara were high-ranking administrators who liked to spend their vacation years out in the colonies. This particular planet, discovered by the Senechi some five generations before, was known as 143-Arkon Three. The natives called it Earth. There were over fifty million natives, or hu-

mans, and many of them were quite intelligent; this airship had been designed and built entirely by the natives. 143-Arkon Three was a pleasant world despite the ice-sheets covering most of its land surface, and Vel Senna had visited it twice before.

Four days ago their hired airship had landed at a remote mountain valley called Inghota. Its main feature of interest was the Temple of Invisible Fire, which contained many sacred relics. Vel Senna had persuaded the old priest to tell them some of the ancient legends. The one which roused their interest was the story of the Summer Goddess, who lived in a cave full of gold and jewels in a mysterious ice-free valley far to the north. The two Senechi immediately decided to visit the valley. The priest tried to dissuade them, but his outburst merely convinced the Senechi that there was some truth in the story. And now, four days later, their airship had reached the valley.

The speaking tube whistled. Vel Senna opened it.

"Captain Zing speaking, sir. We are about to land on the high ground between the ship and the valley. Is this convenient, or do you wish to land nearer it?"

Vel Senna quickly identified the spot. It was a small rise where the ice probably concealed a low hill.

The distance from the rise to the valley was three-quarters of a Senechi mile — about one kilometer in the native measure. "Yes, this will do. Land at once." He replaced the cork.

"Landing here?" asked Krau Sara. "We shall have nearly a mile to walk."

"We can use a sledge, if our guide is not too frightened of the goddess to drive us."

"Weston will give no trouble. The only one who seems frightened of the goddess so far is yourself."

"I am taking an elementary precaution, that is all," said Vel Cenna. He thought Krau Sara was taking the priest's warnings too lightly. He was sure the native had been sincere. "There may not be a goddess, but there is something unusual below those tree-tops. A single ice-free valley in a zone of severe glaciation cannot be natural."

"It could be volcanic. Soon we will find out."

"Soon we shall find the gold," said Vel Senna.

Moments later, the airship settled gently on the ice. The valley as seen from the ground was a thin line of green near the skyline, with only the topmost branches visible. Nothing of the valley floor could be seen.

Vel Senna uncorked the tube for the last time. "Captain, instruct our guide to drive us to the valley. Prepare a motor sledge at once."

Krau Sarà was still gazing through the window. "The priest was right about the valley. I hope he was right about the treasure as well."

"And the goddess?"

"The tale is centuries old. If she ever existed she has been dead for many years."

Vel Senna went to the door. "There is only one way to find out. To the sledge, my friend."

Krau Sara followed him down.

The prisoner lived in silence, but the silence was in his mind.

There were days when he could not remember who he was. He sat alone in the cave, in darkness, trying to recall his identity. It had been so long that sometimes he forgot he had ever had a name. Escape was the only dream he had.

Every afternoon the prisoner went outside the cave and wandered idly through the sunken forest. The grass was soft underfoot, and birds nested in the branches. The real world had been under the ice for longer than he could remember, but within this timeless valley the Ice Age did not exist. Everything was green, and he hated it. Far in the distance he could see the ice-covered mountains, beckoning to him. They had the same cold beauty as the woman who possessed him. She walked in the forest too, but she never looked at the mountains.

Early one afternoon, before it was time to go outside, the prisoner felt a strange stirring in his mind. He was thinking about his walks through the trees, and he realized that he could remember a time when all the world had been covered with trees.

He lay quiet in his dark little corner of the cave rediscovering his past as it returned to him. It sometimes happened like this, as the witch's power lessened for a while; he became sane again. Gradually the cloud lifted.

He had had a beginning. He had not always been in this valley. That was why he wanted to escape; he belonged to the world outside.

It had been in the days when ice was something new and dreadful. He and his two companions came to the valley, seeking to rob the mad woman of her jewels and precious metals. Her treasure was the wealth of a dozen forgotten nations. She was tall and fair-skinned, and wore a circlet of pale gold to match her hair. Her skin was smooth and clear, and she seemed still young. The men thought she would offer little resistance, but they were wrong.

He was the only one to survive. She killed his two companions, and the men who came after. She stripped the flesh from their bodies and fashioned their bones into weird ship-like structures, wrapped around with gold leaf and

laden with gems. Sometimes she made the skulls into grotesque figureheads for the skeleton-ships. The prisoner watched her do it, again and again, and his desire for the treasure faded away.

He tried to think how long he had been here, but he could not remember. Parts of his mind were still gray. He recalled other passing spells of sanity, and his successful attempts to escape. He must escape now, today, before the clouds returned.

His chance would come during his afternoon walk in the valley. There was another way to the outside world — a huge air shaft at the back of the tunnels — but its walls were too steep to climb. The valley was his path to freedom. In his usual state, possessed by the witch, he never dared leave the valley. This time it would be different.

He had to be careful. If he stayed too long in this corner, the witch might wonder what he was doing. It was time he went to join her, in the chamber where the Sleeper lay dreaming beneath his golden blankets.

Quietly the prisoner walked down the tunnel towards the Sleeper. The way to the valley was through the main chamber, so he would have to wait until the witch let him go out. As he walked, he looked at the row of skeleton-



Virgil
Finlay

ships lining the wall on his left. There was just enough light to see them. The first ships were in the Sleeper's chamber, where the witch worked, and the later ones stretched away end to end along the dark tunnels. Each ship meant another adventurer had died — but how often did treasure-seekers visit this distant valley?

He kept his face impassive as he entered the chamber. The soft orange light seemed strong after the darkness of the tunnels. The witch did not look up from her work as she sat on the bare floor. She was cutting a ruby with a small knife which buzzed steadily in her hand. Her long golden hair hung shining against her black dress on her shoulders. Its brightness made him think of sunshine. She looked young, hardly more than twenty. She had looked the same on the day he and his two friends came to steal the jewels. But he too had not changed, and he remembered the long line of skeleton-ships along the tunnel.

The light in the cave was supplied by a crystal sphere suspended from the ceiling. A burning brand was trapped within the sphere, giving out a pale orange light. The brand was never consumed. Even the flame had been frozen by the witch.

Directly below the sphere was the couch of the Sleeper. Under his golden blankets the youth lay still

and peaceful. The witch had cared for him well. Even more than the prisoner, the Sleeper was completely in her power. He had no chance of escape at all. At least the prisoner had his occasional days of sanity, unlike the Sleeper.

He had such a day now. Soon the witch would take him out into the valley. He waited, and presently the moment came.

Its engine roaring, the sledge slowed down and came to a halt on the edge of the ice. Weston, their native guide, switched off. The two Senechi stepped off the boards and stood on the thin frozen crust. They looked down into the valley.

"I do not understand," said Vel Senna. "I see only trees and grass. I see no trace of occupation. Where is the machinery needed to keep this area free of ice?"

"It could be underground," said Krau Sara, or those boulders at the northern end could be a camouflaged heating unit."

Something was heating the valley. Thirty feet below them grew obviously natural temperate-zone flora. The trees were all deciduous, the highest having their tops level with the Senechi. The only animals in sight were a brown furry tree-climber and several small birds. No humans were visible.

"The place seems deserted," said Krau Sara. He addressed the

guide. "Weston, bring the lamps. We shall look for the cave."

"No, sir," said Weston. "I'm staying here."

The human sat firmly in his pilot seat. He had not left the sledge.

"Did you hear that, Vel Senna?"

"I understand Earth Basic as well as you. Weston, are you refusing to obey our orders?"

"Yes, sir. I'm not going into that valley. I know what's down there."

Vel Senna lifted his whip threateningly, but the native shook his head. Vel Senna knew this gesture meant refusal.

"A native taboo against entering the holy place," Krau Sara suggested in Senechi.

"I agree. Weston expects the legendary goddess to destroy us." Vel Senna spoke to the guide again, "Weston, we will overlook this matter. Give us the lamps and then take the sledge back to the airship. Return in three hours with lifting tackle and a towing sledge."

"Thank you, sir. I'll arrange everything." Weston looked relieved for a brief moment. "And . . . Sir, I can't stop you, but I think you shouldn't go near that cave. Believe me, it's more dangerous than you realize."

I appreciate your concern," said Vel Senna patiently, "but we Senechi can protect ourselves."

The huge centauroids were larger and tougher than anything now na-

tive to Earth. They had no need of human guards.

They watched Weston drive away, then returned to studying the valley. It did not look like a trap.

"We should be cautious," said Vel Senna. "Weston is comparatively reliable, like the captain. He would not warn us of danger without good reason."

"The cave may be occupied by a wild beast if not by a goddess. There is always a first time for discovering a new species. I think a *little* caution is wise."

Vel Senna pointed to the upper end of the valley. "See that open space covered with boulders, and the bare rock of the cliff face. The stream appears to flow from there. It is the most likely place for a cave."

Krau Sara agreed. The two Senechi walked along the valley rim, their hooves sinking deep into the ice, until they reached a vantage point to look down on the fallen boulders. There were very few trees at this end; the ground was mainly exposed rock with a few patches of grass. In the cliff face were several promising shadows, and at last Vel Senna judged it safe to leave the ice.

They scrambled down the slope to the rocky floor thirty feet below, trying to avoid any undue noise. They did not want to arouse

anything in the cave, animal or goddess.

"It is warm," said Vel Senna, as he felt his skin adjusting to the higher temperature. "I wish I could see some of the heating equipment."

"It must be well camouflaged," said Krau Sara. "I am certain these plants are survivals from the pre-glacial period. Time has stood still in this valley."

"The priest used those same words at the Temple of Invisible Fire. He has been right about everything so far."

"So far, Vel Senna. He could be wrong about the jewels — and right about the goddess, although I doubt it. We take the risk. Come, follow me towards the cave."

The two Senechi crept forward, close to the cliff face. Approaching the entrance in this way, they could not be seen from inside. Quietly they picked their way through the boulders.

Suddenly they heard a faint sound ahead. They sank down upon the stones, lowering their bodies right to the ground. They waited.

Two humans came out of the cave. One was a man, the other a woman. They walked into the trees without seeing the hidden Senechi.

The man was old, and wore a brown trouser suit. Vel Senna

glimpsed a gray beard on his chin.

The woman was much younger, wearing a long black dress which reached to her ankles. She had bright yellow hair which trailed out behind her. By native standards she was extremely beautiful.

The goddess, thought Vel Senna.

II

John Weston stood on the lower deck of the airship. The seven crewmen were facing him as he told them why he had returned without the aliens. The crew had seen him bring back the empty sledge.

"We shouldn't leave them in that valley," said Mike Jones, the burly chief engineer. "We ought to go back before the three hours are up."

Weston shrugged. "I tried to stop them going down, but they wouldn't listen. Still, maybe the witch only kills humans."

"Don't you believe it," said another engineer. "The witch kills anyone who goes after her treasure."

"This pair isn't bad for Senechi," said Mike. "They don't hand out the floggings like some of these third-generation types."

Ram Badal Zing was the captain and part owner of the airship. He said, "Mr. Weston, you accompanied our clients into the museum of radiation studies. How

much did the attendant tell them about the valley?"

"Most of it," said Weston, thinking back to that day in Inghotta. The attendant had described the cave and the treasure quite accurately. He had warned them about the witch. But he had not mentioned her son who was now dreaming away the centuries. "He didn't say anything about the Sleeper. Maybe he didn't want to interest them too much. He stopped answering their questions when he realized they wanted to go there."

"Perhaps you should have done the same," said the captain.

Mike had taken a quick look at the Senechi through a small telescope. "Don't worry, they're still on the ice. Our bosses have moved along a bit and now they've settled down to watch something. They aren't rushing in there just yet."

"That's better," said Weston. "I thought they were going straight down. As long as they stay up here they'll be all right."

All the same, he thought, Mike was right. If the Senechi did enter the valley, he ought to take the sledges back, just in case. Although, what could he do for the aliens if they were seen by the witch?

"Well," said Anna, "you may enjoy standing here doing nothing, but I don't."

Anna Holm, a tall Nordic blonde, was their navigator. She pointed over the rail at the two aliens and continued, "They'll never miss one of the sledges. I'll take one and check up on that pit we saw on the way down."

"I don't . . . It's highly irregular," said Captain Zing.

Weston remembered seeing the pit as the airship landed — a circular patch of shadow on the brilliant white ice. It was near the valley but rather small, so maybe the Senechi hadn't spotted it. Wanting to poke around it was typical of Anna. Crazy idea! He and Mike Jones came from a country where women were barred from holding responsible positions. The more he saw of Anna, the more he admitted the old folks had had some sense. That pit was only a queer-shaped crevasse . . .

Then the implication hit him. The pit was along the line of the valley's axis. Was it another cave entrance? It might be a new way into the Sleeper's cave.

"One sledge," said Captain Zing, giving in reluctantly.

"That's settled, then," said Anna. She thumbed the davit buttons. "I'll take this sledge. I'll be back well before the three hours are up."

"You are not going alone," said Captain Zing. "Someone must accompany you."

"Why don't you?" she asked,

as her sledge was lowered automatically onto the ice.

"I'll go," said Mike quickly. "You're right, cap'n — someone's got to keep an eye on her."

"I can take care of myself!"

"The Senechi thought so too," said Weston. "I'm not so sure. I'll come along with you. We'll take the lifting gear they want on a trailer, so we can go straight from the pit to the valley to meet the bosses."

"Hmm," said Anna. "It might save time. All right. Load up."

"One other thing," said Weston to the captain. "If our bosses go into the valley, send someone over there. Flash us with a signal lamp if you need us."

"Certainly," said Captain Zing. "You know best, Mr. Weston."

His tone implied the opposite. Zing didn't like him, he knew. A good captain, though.

Well, it didn't matter. He was off to the pit with Anna Holm. He helped Mike finish loading the trailer.

"Come along," said the witch. The prisoner accompanied her down the passage to the cave mouth. The sunlight at the entrance was the most beautiful sight in the world. If he succeeded now, he need never see the orange light of the Sleeper's chamber again. He followed her into the open air.

In the woods, they parted with-

out speaking. The witch expected him to follow his usual afternoon routine. He went on beside the stream until he was sure he was well away from her.

This was it. All he had to do was climb up the slopes onto the ice. He would be free. The real world was very near now.

A bird on a branch caught his eye. It was a dark grayish-blue bird with a yellow breast, and a bright inquisitive eye. Poor prisoner. But he was different from the bird. He was going to escape.

He left the stream and hurried through the trees to the side of the valley. Ten meters above him, the slope levelled off and the ice-fields began. Up there was freedom.

He did not hesitate. If she recaptured him, he was lost again, perhaps for good. He thrust one foot firmly on the slope. How easy it was! He took another step, and another.

On the fourth upward step his foot seemed heavier. On the fifth it was heavier still. He faltered.

She was trying to hold him back. He could feel the strain mounting as he struggled to lift his feet.

He drove himself up towards the ice. The higher he reached, the more he suffered. His heart throbbed like a mighty engine, and there was pain with every beat. He sank to the ground, unable to stand any more, but he went on crawling.

Every movement took an eternity to accomplish. His limbs had become monstrous, stiff and clumsy, and the weight of his body pressed him into the ground. Inch by inch he dragged himself up. He moved through shadows, for the light was fading around him. Still he fought the invisible power binding him to the valley.

His upward progress was barely perceptible. His lungs were almost bursting under the pressure. Now the light was gone completely, and he strained forward in darkness.

The blackness exploded within him, and he was overwhelmed. Red shadows whirled around him. His grip on the earth failed. He slid, and rolled downward, and came to rest on the grass.

He lay still, arms outstretched. After a while he opened his eyes.

The witch stood over him, her golden hair shining in the sun. Her dress was the color of night.

She smiled, her expression mocking, and she spoke. "When you are ready, come back to the cave. Don't be too long; we have visitors."

Then she was gone. He lay there, helpless, his body aching, his eyes watering. He was still a prisoner.

Vel Senna crouched among the boulders, glancing from the trees to the rocks and back again. The goddess and her companion had been gone for several minutes.

Nobody else had come out of the cave.

"Quickly," whispered Krau Sara. "Let us go inside before they return."

They rose swiftly and bounded to the entrance. It was wide enough for them both, and the roof was several feet above their heads. Switching on their lamps, they went in.

The tunnel grew smaller and narrower. It bore to the left, past a strange pillar of rock. Vel Senna shone his lamps on the stone column. It took the form of a giant human arm, the elbow rising from the stone floor, the hand apparently supporting the roof. The workmanship was extremely crude.

"I think it is unfinished," said Krau Sara.

"Perhaps the sculpture was abandoned when the ice came," suggested Vel Senna. The opposite wall of the cave was blank. He looked around for further relics and noticed a faint orange glow in the tunnel ahead. He pointed to it.

"Let us go nearer," whispered Krau Sara.

Past the stone arm, they had to go in single file, stooping to avoid the roof. Krau Sara led the way, blocking Vel Senna's view. Then the tunnel opened out again, and they entered a large high-roofed chamber. An orange bulb in the ceiling shone brightly.

"The jewels," said Krau Sara.

Gems and precious metals lay in confused heaps around the chamber. Vel Senna saw long rods of shining silver, pyramids of golden bars, and mounds of countless precious stones. Some jewels were in mixed heaps, others had been sorted — emeralds in one pile, sapphires in another, rubies in a third. There was no furniture, only the treasure. Leaning against the walls were hundreds of shields and dishes made of gold studded with gems. A miniature hill in the center seemed to be entirely gold.

Vel Senna picked up the nearest shield. The soft gold had been battered and deeply scored, and over half the diamonds were missing from their sockets. The rest of the relics had received similar treatment. Despite this, the hoard was enough to put them both into the highest non-hereditary caste. The Senechi valued treasure like this even more highly than humans did.

He saw a large sheet of gold nearby. It bore the shape of a human hand, impressed on it like a footprint in wet clay. Vel Senna showed it to Karu Sara. "The metal must have been softened in the cold state for that print to be made."

"You are right," said Krau Sara. "There are more prints on the gold discs there. They could only have been made with a molecular field distorter."

"I know. But the selective distorter is a heavy industrial machine weighing many tons. Do you see the implications?"

"I think so."

"This valley is maintained by post-technological techniques. Here, at least, Earth's old civilization was ahead of us. We saw no machines because the natives have passed beyond machines. Elsewhere they reverted to technology, but here they carried their ancient secrets with them into the Ice Age."

"The theory is fanciful, but you could be right. It explains the absence of the heating equipment, which you were seeking so anxiously."

"I am sure of it," said Vel Senna. He indicated the orange bulb in the ceiling. "That lamp functions, undoubtedly, but its purpose is mainly decorative. Everything in this chamber is for pleasure."

"Forget your theories," said Krau Sara, eyeing the treasure again. "We are here for gems, not for science. We must collect a first installment before the natives return. I thought *you* were the cautious one, not I!"

Krau Sara was right, of course. Vel Senna followed his example and swallowed a few pounds of emeralds and rubies into his first stomach. He need not regurgitate the stones until he was back on the airship.

Gazing across the chamber, Vel Senna saw a peculiar structure of gold and silver. It resembled a native sailing ship. There was a row of others like it, stretching away into a small tunnel entrance. As he looked for more, he saw a patch of lighter color in the central golden mound. The longer he stared, the stranger it seemed. Puzzled, he went over to look.

The light object was a human head, fair-haired, facing upwards. The mound was a circular golden bed, and the head belonged to a human being sleeping there.

At his call Krau Sara came over. He saw the sleeping man.

"We must leave," whispered Vel Senna. "He might awake."

"Yes," said Krau Sara. "We must go at once."

As they turned, they saw someone enter the chamber. It was the woman they had seen earlier, tall and beautiful in her black dress. She held up her hand.

"You can't go," said the goddess. "I won't let you."

III

Weston steered the sledge in a curve around the valley, the engine muted. He did not want the Senechi to stop him on his way to the pit. Explanations might be awkward. Despite the added weight of the loaded trailer, the sledge reached the pit in five minutes.

"Everybody out," said Mike. "Let's have a look at it."

The pit was a large smooth-sided shaft, twenty feet in diameter, absolutely vertical, with a floor of rough gray stone. There was no snow inside it at all.

"That's nice," said Anna Holm. "It's ice-free, just like the valley."

"The bottom's about fifteen feet down," said Weston. "It's a bit far to jump. Anyway, we couldn't climb out again. Those sides have been polished smooth."

"We'll throw a rope down," said Mike.

Weston nodded. "Sure. We can use some of the gear here. I'll pull it off the trailer."

"Wait a minute," said Anna. Weston waited.

"Why are you two so eager to go down there?"

"No harm in a quick check," said Mike.

"Seems safe enough," added Weston.

"No it doesn't, and you know it. That pit obviously has something to do with the valley. You didn't dare go with the bosses, but you're falling over yourselves to jump down *there*. Why change your minds so suddenly?"

"I can guess John's reason," said Mike. "A way round the prohibition?"

"What prohibition?" asked Anna, pouncing.

"It's a long story," said Weston,

silently cursing Mike. He had no wish to tell Anna about the death of his ancestors in the valley. Still, he had better give her part of the truth.

"We guides are forbidden to enter this valley. It's Family law. Most of the other banned zones are radioactive. This place doesn't have any radiation, but it comes on the same forbidden list. The valley is just as deadly, in its own way, as a ruined nuclear power station."

"Then why do you want to go down the pit?" asked Anna.

"The list includes the valley. It says nothing about this pit."

That statement was misleading, but he intended it to be. Besides, it was true.

"You men!" said Anna. "Hoping to get into the caves by a back way without breaking Family rules, are you? I don't know!"

He knew she was satisfied. She already had a low opinion of men from his country.

Weston and Mike brought over the tackle from the trailer and set it up. The rope ladder dangled over the edge of the pit, hanging invitingly from the paying-out board.

"Well, here I go," said Anna, hand on the rope.

"Not so fast!" said Mike. "One of us is going down before you."

Even after years in Anna's country the old instincts returned.

"I'll go," said Weston. "You stay there, Anna — the navigator's more valuable than the guide."

"You just want the thrill of being first," said Anna.

"No, never," said Mike. "We're making sure the place is safe for you. Go on, John, before she makes a jump."

"When the Family try me for breaking regulations, at least I'll be able to say I was first down."

He started descending the ladder as he spoke. Seconds later he was standing on the rocky floor.

"I'm down. Well, you can see that. Leave the ladder where it is. The sides are so smooth nobody could climb out. No holds at all."

"Can you see anything?" called Anna.

"Something," said Weston. He had found the dark opening of a low cave, level with the floor.

"It's a tunnel going into the rock. This is the side facing the valley, isn't it?"

Anna checked. "Yes. Your tunnel must lead towards the Sleeper's cave."

It probably did. There was quite a draft in the opening.

"I'm coming down!" called Anna.

"All right," said Weston. "Do you mind staying up there, Mike?"

"No, you're welcome. From the look of that gap I couldn't squeeze into the cave anyway. Wrong shape. Say, John, tie a rope round you.

Then I can call you back if we get any signals from the cap'n."

"Right," said Weston. Mike threw him one end of a lightweight coil, and he tied it around his chest. Four tugs from Mike would mean that he had to return at once.

Anna joined him. She gave him a small torch. "One each." She switched hers on and studied the opening.

"Off we go," said Anna. She slid herself into the shadow.

"I thought I was going first," said Weston.

"You thought wrong, mate," said Mike. "Hop after her before she vanishes."

Hurriedly Weston followed Anna into the cave. Darkness surrounded him.

"You can't go," said the goddess. "I won't let you."

Vel Senna knew there was no way out from the chamber. The goddess was standing in the entrance, and the other tunnel was too low for Senechi to use. He and Krau Sara were trapped.

"Can you understand me?" she asked.

"Yes, perfectly," he replied in Earth Basic.

"Sit down," said the goddess.

There was no furniture in the cave, other than the couch with its sleeping occupant. Vel Senna knelt on the floor beside a group

of ancient jewel-studded shields. The goddess sat gracefully in front of the Senechi. She matched the priest's description of the Summer Goddess, but she looked like a normal female native. Only the gold circlet on her head was unusual.

"I've never seen creatures like you before," said the goddess. "What are you?"

"We are Senechi," said Krau Sara. "Surely you recognize us?"

"No. Where do you come from?"

Vel Senna understood then that the goddess had never heard of the Senechi, even though Earth had been discovered nearly two centuries ago. "Surely, even in this isolated northern valley you know about the Senechi?"

"I know nothing about you. Tell me."

"We are natives of a planet called Delvla," said Vel Senna. He described how his race had discovered space travel and started colonizing the planets of nearby stars. Earth was one such colony, with nearly a quarter of a million Senechi living in the equatorial region. The goddess had no difficulty in understanding the concept of space travel. She had not known any surprise at their non-human bodies either.

"What brings visitors from another world to my valley?"

"We are searching for traces of the legendary pre-glacial civilization," said Vel Senna. He hoped

she had not seen them swallow the jewels.

"We were warned to keep away," added Krau Sara. "They said a goddess killed everyone who came here. A foolish superstition. . . ."

"Foolish?" She smiled. "You came here to steal my gold, didn't you?"

"We are scientists, explorers," Vel Senna began. His protest was interrupted by the voice of a native.

"You're thieves!"

It was the old man they had seen earlier, outside. They had not heard him enter the chamber.

"She'll kill you," said the man. "She always kills you, whatever you are. You're all thieves to her."

"Sit down and be quiet," said the goddess. "Ignore him. He is mad."

The man sat down, running his fingers through his gray beard. His clothes and face were streaked with mud, Vel Senna noticed. Who was he? The priest had not mentioned him.

"You Senechi, come over here," said the goddess. "I'll show you what I do to thieves."

She rose and led them across the chamber to the ship-like structures. She pointed to the first. It had a corrugated golden hull, decorated with precious stones, and had five sails of thin silver sheeting. All the metal shone.

"That was Pilovitch," said the bearded man.

"Can you recognize a human skeleton?" asked the goddess.

Vel Senna recognized one now. The hull of the ship was a human rib-cage. The bones were covered with gold foil, and the gaps between them filled in with gold and jewels, but it was clearly part of a human skeleton.

"I discarded the skull," said the goddess. "The arms and legs I used in the ship. The mainmast is a fibula, and the other two masts come from the lower arms. You see, this is an ulna. The remaining arm and leg bones filled this gap between the ribs and the pelvis."

It was a beautiful piece of work. So was the next one, and the next. Vel Senna could see a long series of skeleton-ships disappearing into the small tunnel. None of them was identical in design, but the basic materials were obviously the same. Many of the ships had skulls in the bows or high on the masts.

"I've been making these since my vigil began. The thieves keep coming, and I always need more bones." She studied the two Senechi. "I'm not sure what to do with you. You're almost human from the waist up, but the quadruped part of you is a problem."

Vel Senna said nothing. He pictured the succession of jewel thieves who had met their deaths

in this valley. It was disturbing to know he would join them, so far from the communal dying-place of his home.

"How can we escape?" asked Krau Sara, in Senechi.

"I don't know," said Vel Senna. They looked at the skeletons, then back at the entrance.

"You can't get out," said the bearded man watching them. "It's too late. You've forgotten how to resist here. You were in her power from the moment she saw you."

"Ow!" exclaimed Anna. "That is the second time I've hit my head on the roof."

"Not so much noise," whispered Weston. "They'll hear you at the other end of the cave."

He and Anna were still crawling through the tunnel. It was sloping very slightly downwards. The light from their torches cast strange shadows on the walls as they moved forward.

"It's all right for you — you haven't bumped yourself once yet."

"I have enough sense to keep my head down. Keep moving, Anna."

"I am moving! Don't rush me. There, John. The cave's opening out."

About time too, he thought. If he went on crawling much longer he'd forget how to walk.

Soon the tunnel was four feet high and almost as wide. Small-

er openings appeared in the sides at intervals, but the main passage was obviously the way ahead. After a while Weston took the lead. The cave was high enough for him to get up off his stomach. Anna did the same.

He tried to make as little noise as possible. There was no knowing where sound might carry in these passages.

According to his sense of direction, the cave was heading towards the valley. The twists and turns did not affect its overall direction.

Quite suddenly, he came round a slight bend and saw a strange silver and gold object shining in the torch-light. He stopped.

"What is it, John? Not a dead end?"

"No." He let her move up alongside him.

It was like a model of a sailing boat, made from jewels and precious metals. He could see others ahead, forming a long glittering row against the dark stone. There was just enough room to squeeze between the line of boats and the opposite wall. He glanced over them quickly. All had squat golden bodies with silver sails above. Hundreds of gems sparkled in them.

They knelt down to examine the first object. It seemed unfinished, as if someone had put the main members of the hull together and

then forgotten to fill up the gaps, Inside the hollow boat, partly hidden in its covered bows, were several long golden rods with knobbed ends. Weston picked up one of the rods, thinking it looked familiar. He scratched the metal experimentally. The gold leaf rumbled and came curling away.

Weston unwound the gold sheet, exposing a hard whitish substance beneath. It took him a moment to realize what it was. Anna said it for him.

"It's a bone. That's a human arm bone."

A sudden shiver ran along his spine. He carefully replaced the bone. He paused and looked hard at the boats. The next one had a strange figurehead — a human skull.

He studied the first boat again. Now he knew what to look for, he could easily identify it as a rib-cage. The arms, legs and head had been removed at some time, leaving only the bones of the torso from the neck to the pelvic girdle. Everything in the mutilated skeleton was covered with gold leaf, and the ribs bore clusters of diamonds.

"There must be dozens of them along here," said Anna. "So this is where all the people disappear to."

"The witch does this," said Weston. "It's what you'd expect of her, if you knew the old stories."

At that moment something jerked around his chest. He felt a spasm of fear; he had forgotten the rope. It jerked again — four times in all.

"That's Mike's signal," said Weston. "The Senechi must have gone into the valleys."

"We can't go back now! We've just started finding things."

"It's tough, I know. The Sleeper's cave can't be far now. But if we're wanted up top we've got to go."

"I suppose so." She stared at the golden remains again. "They're horrible, but they're fascinating."

"So they are." He touched the diamonds on the skeleton, then drew back. "I hate leaving these, but we can come back for them later. Come on."

They started back slowly towards the surface. At the pit, Mike Jones was waiting for them to return.

Perhaps it was his imagination, but Vel Senna fancied the orange glow had deepened to imitate the death-lamps of his homeland.

"Why do you not kill us now?" he asked.

"I don't know how to use you," said the goddess. "Your two separate rib-cages won't form a ship as they are. I don't want to sever your spinal columns, but there's no other way."

"Let us leave and your problem will be solved," said Krau Sara.

"You can't leave. I'll kill you tonight whether you give me an answer or not."

After that, the goddess appeared to lose interest in her captives. She sat down by a heap of rubies, putting a handful in her lap and examining them one by one. Watching her, Vel Senna wondered how many other prisoners she had held in this chamber.

"Pretty, isn't she?" said the bearded man. "Do you think you'll escape?"

"I do not know," said Vel Senna.

"She kills them all. She should have killed me with the rest."

"You will not die," said the goddess, momentarily looking up from her rubies. "I shall keep you alive."

"You're the lucky ones," said the man to the Senechi. "You'll die soon."

"How long have you been a prisoner here?" asked Vel Senna.

"I can't remember. I know I'll be here until *he* awakes." The man pointed to the sleeping form in the central mound.

"Who is he?"

The prisoner ignored Vel Senna's question. "You know, he's the cause of all this. If he'd never been born, none of this would have happened. Everything depends on that boy. When he awakes the valley will cease to exist."

How absurd, thought Vel Senna. I could arouse him with a single touch.

Why not? He reached out for the Sleeper. Somehow he failed to touch him. He moved forward again, but the Sleeper was still the same distance away. It was impossible to reach the golden bed.

"What is happening?" he asked.

"Nothing," said Krau Sara. "What do you mean?"

"I told you, you're in her power," said the prisoner.

Vel Senna gave up the attempt. "It is very strange."

"It is simple," said the goddess. "I don't want you to touch my son."

Her explanation was no explanation at all. If an invisible force-field had surrounded the bed, Vel Senna would have understood, but her casual disregard for logic and science left him bewildered.

"Your son?" asked Krau Sara. "Is that sleeping human your child?"

"Of course he is. Didn't you know?"

"The priest said nothing about him," said Vel Senna.

"I'd better tell you, if you don't know where you are. My son and I came here when the long winter began. I've guarded him ever since."

"Impossible!" cried Vel Senna. "The last interglacial period end-

ed at least a thousand years ago?"

"What?" the bearded man stood up, staring at the goddess.

"It doesn't matter. It will be longer still before the ice melts. When the Ice Age comes to an end, my son will awake. He will go out into the world and rule over its peoples. That is his destiny."

"I have heard this before," said Vel Senna. "It is nonsense."

"It is true. He will build new civilizations."

"I cannot believe it," said Vel Senna. "This tale of a Sleeping God occurs on many planets. It is common among the religious beliefs of primitive people."

"A thousand years," said the bearded man.

"Forget the legends. You are in my world. My son will inherit the Earth at the end of the ice."

"Will the ice ever melt?" asked Krau Sara.

"It must," said the prisoner.

Vel Senna remembered the old stories he had heard from the natives. The humans had reached the height of their ancient civilization, only to see it destroyed by the advancing ice. All trace of that age had vanished, except for the Summer Goddess and her valley. By her power she had held back the ice for a thousand years. She had defied the laws of the Universe to shape the destiny of her son. It was beyond reason.

He looked at the goddess again.

She had said the bearded prisoner was mad, but it must be she who was mad. And yet . . . In this valley Time had stopped. She might be insane, but that did not lessen her power.

"So your son will awake and rule your planet," said Krau Sara. "What is his name?"

"Conqueror," said the goddess.

IV

On the edge of the ice, Weston and the others gazed down into the valley. Nothing moved.

"This is where the Senechi were last seen," said Captain Ram Badal Zing. "They vanished before we arrived."

The two female engineers had accompanied the captain. One of them said, "I saw a man walking out of the trees. He went into a cave among the rocks."

"Has he come out?" asked Weston. "No? Where's the cave?"

The captain pointed. "That large opening just this side of the stream."

"What did the man look like?"

"Bearded, gray hair, pale skin, brown clothes," said the woman who had seen him.

"You think our bosses are in that cave?" asked Mike.

"They are not in the valley," said Captain Zing.

Below them the trees were still. Only a few small birds could be

seen. Weston searched in vain for a flash of purple.

"Any sign of the witch?"

"No."

Weston paused. It would be almost certain death to go after the Senechi. He knew now how those earlier Westons had felt, centuries ago, standing on this same brink.

It had started with his ancestor Endes Weston, whose gang had crowned their previous robberies by stealing his own Family Shield. The rest could be forgiven, but not the Shield. The Family of Guides traced the gang as far as the valley, and here the trail ended. Several Westons had died before the quest was finally abandoned. Some people who only spent a few moments in the valley survived, but those who went into the cave never returned.

John Weston felt responsible for the Senechi. He had brought them here. He had been mad to think they could find the Shield for him. It was his duty to save them somehow. He wished he had never accepted their contract.

He might reach the Sleeper's chamber through the tunnel from the pit, but the Senechi could never get out that way. The centauroids were far too big for the narrow tunnel.

"We've got guns and grenades on the sledge," said one of the engineers. "We could fight our way in."

"Don't be stupid!" said Mike. "Guns against the witch?"

"A cave is an excellent defensive position," said the captain.

Weston made no comment. They had no idea what ancient weapons the witch might have in her cave. The ice had covered so much.

"I know," said Anna Holm. "One person could slip in and look around without being seen."

Good idea, thought Weston. It might just work.

"No," said Mike. "If there were guards waiting inside we'd never see them."

"I could look in with a night telescope. I'd see the guards then."

"You could?" snapped Weston.

"Yes, why not? I've been in caves before."

"So have I," said Weston, and his decision was made. "You're not going. I am."

He should have gone down with the Senechi at the beginning.

"That's typical of you two. You keep all the exciting things for yourselves."

"It's not exciting, Anna. It's dangerous." That woman would never learn.

Swiftly he began arming himself with weapons from the sledges. Guns for gas, projectiles, ice and sonic rays. Grenades: smoke, gas, explosive — one of them might work.

Captain Zing coughed. "Mr. Weston, you are under a separate contract. I cannot order you not to go down."

"Then don't," said Weston. He checked his weapons. "That's enough. If I break a photoelectric relay it's too bad. Give me twenty minutes in the cave. If you don't see me by then I won't be coming out. Don't come in after me."

He walked to the very limit of the ice. His feet touched the valley earth.

"Good luck, Mr. Weston," said Captain Zing.

Looking up, he realized the man meant it.

"John," said Anna quickly, "how will you know when the twenty minutes are up?"

"My watch, of course? Why?"

"This is the valley where time stands still. Will your watch work down there?"

He held up his wrist. "It's working now."

"People have been in the valley before," said the captain. "If the body rhythms continue normally, timepieces will not be affected."

"There you are," said Weston. "Time hasn't really stopped. She's done something else to it."

It was an intriguing notion, but he could not pursue it now. "See you later, then. Twenty minutes."

It was too easy. Weston went down the slope, across the grass

and into the fallen boulders, all without incident. Nearing the cave mouth, he crept forward slowly. He knew the others were watching him from the ice.

Almost there, he had a moment of doubt. What if Anna had been right, and time flowed differently in the valley? His watch seemed normal, but suppose a few minutes in the valley were equivalent to several hours of outside time. Twenty minutes to him might seem like a day to the people outside. Well, it was too late for him to worry about that now. He thought of those dead Westons of long ago.

He drew his night telescope and peered into the shadows. The cave was empty as far as a corner. This was still too easy. As he walked in he drew his projectile gun.

A faint glow appeared at the far end, growing brighter as he walked on. The old histories were true, he thought, seeing a rounded pillar of rock at his side. This could only be the Sleeper's cave. Then suddenly the passage opened out, and he was in the chamber.

The orange light and the Sleepers couch were as he had expected. Gold and jewels lay everywhere, astonishing him by their sheer quantity. The two Senechi were there, and the bearded man the engineer had seen. There, too, was the golden-haired witch, dressed in black, a legend come alive. The

dead Westons were very close to him now.

Whipping up his projectile gun, he squeezed off a quick burst of bullets. They had no effect. He fired the whole clip, but she was unharmed. Somehow he was not surprised.

He had other weapons. He snatched up a two-second smoke grenade, thumbed it and flung it at her. The bearded man jumped up towards the witch, and then the white smoke enveloped them both.

High up near the roof, something dark and shapeless floated towards him. It touched the smoke and withered away.

Shaken by the sight of that dark presence, he set off two more grenades. As they burst, he saw the bearded man go flying backwards to crash against the wall. Simultaneously, waves of dizziness washed through his brain. The Senechi were standing at the fringe of the smoke clouds, unmoving.

"Run, you idiots!" he cried. "Get out."

They remained like statues, and the smoke covered them. The dizziness pulsed through him, stronger and stronger. Tiny blue electric discharges appeared in the smoke; he heard them crackling. The blue sparks flashed towards him and stung wherever they hit him. His head was throbbing under enormous blows.

The witch appeared from the clouds. He fired his sonic gun, but a giant blue flash jerked it from his hand. The gun hit the floor and exploded.

Both he and the witch were hurled to the ground by the blast. He had not the strength to rise. He thought foolishly that it was a feeble explosion. Recovering his wits despite the constant pounding in his brain, he drew his ice gun. Blue sparks from the smoke still jolted him, but the gun stayed put as he fired.

A stream of rectification impulses hissed towards her, freezing everything in their path. Snowflakes whirled out of the beam, but the witch was untouched.

Sparkling diamonds showered upon them. Weston glimpsed the bearded man through the smoke, casting jewels into the air. The gun crumbled away in his hand, but he hardly noticed. He was almost beaten.

"It's time you stopped this," said the witch, getting to her feet. Sapphires descended from the smoke.

"A thousand years!" cried the bearded man. "Curse you, daughter!"

Suddenly the jewels were glowing. Inner fires flared up within the crystals, flashing out brightly. Some of them struck Weston, burning him. All around him the jewels were heating up, shining

like colored searchlights through the thinning smoke. And the Senechi were screaming.

Then the light was cut off, and everything disappeared. All the noises ceased, even the thunder of his pulse. His mind became quiet and peaceful in the darkness.

All resistance ended, and he let the witch possess him.

Vel Senna watched the battle between their guide and the goddess without emotion. The native could not kill her. He was fighting bravely, but his efforts were in vain. The goddess would soon subdue him.

Smoke swirled around the Senechi, and Vel Senna saw tiny blue sparks crackling in the clouds. Obviously the goddess was using a localized field distorter, although he could not see the instrument.

The bearded prisoner flung handfuls of jewels into the smoke. He cried out, "Curse you, daughter!"

Her face became terrible. Vel Senna screamed.

Fire burst out within him. The gems in his stomach were burning! He coughed in desperation, and with terrible slowness the stones came up. A stream of glowing emeralds and rubies spouted from his mouth.

He had to get out! Suddenly his mind was free. The goddess had lost control.

"This way!" he cried. "Follow me!"

Krau Sara was with him. They raced out of the chamber galloping madly along the tunnel. Sunlight struck them like a blow.

He saw natives above the valley. Their crew! The two giant centauroids hurtled across the ground.

Safety was but a few yards away. Vel Senna put every possible effort into leaping up the slope. His hooves hit ice. They were out.

"We have escaped!" he shouted sending the natives reeling back in alarm. He clasped Krau Sara. Their flight had taken mere seconds, so swiftly had they moved.

He looked with new vision at the ice on which he stood. That frozen white water was more precious than any colored crystals he could possess. It meant he was free of the goddess and her eternal summer. He was back in the Ice Age.

One of the natives stepped forward. It was the dark-skinned captain, Ram Badal Zing. He asked, "Sir, what happened in the cave? Where is Mr. Weston?"

The guide was probably dead by now. He could not win against the goddess. In fact, the sooner, the Senechi left the area the better. It was too dangerous to stay here.

"Where is Mr. Weston?" the captain repeated.

"He has served his purpose," said Vel Senna. "We will return to the airship at once."

"What happened to him?"

These natives were infuriatingly persistent. "He was fighting the goddess when we escaped. He is now dead or a prisoner."

"We can't just leave him," said the chief engineer, Jones.

"You must. The goddess can influence your minds to make escape psychologically impossible. She may be affecting you now. We must not remain here. Get aboard the sledges. We shall hire a new guide at the next town."

"No," said the captain.

Vel Senna boarded the nearest sledge, Krau Sara following. "Captain Zing, I order you to drive back to the ship."

"Mr. Weston is still in the cave."

Vel Senna and the captain stared grimly at each other.

Jones broke the silence. "I'll drive them back, cap'n. The rest of you stay here and look for John. We'll wait for you."

The engineer swung himself into the pilot seat. "I'll have you back in a few moments, sir."

The possibilities were good, thought Vel Senna. Hastily counting the natives here, he calculated there were two crew members at the airship — plus Jones. That was enough to fly to the nearest town, and then they could pick up a fresh crew.

"Drive off," said Jones, kicking on the engine. He cut in the fly-wheel, and the sledge moved off.

That was the last they would see of *those* natives. It was annoying, because good crews were hard to find and also extremely expensive. But it was worth it to escape that terrible valley.

The journey to the airship was over in minutes. Jones halted the sledge in the shadow of the gasbag, right under the davits. Vel Senna gained the lower deck in a single leap.

"Secure the sledge," said Vel Senna to the two humans aboard. They attached the hooks and inched the sledge up into its flight position.

"Jones, come with us to the control room," said Vel Senna.

"Yes, sir." The engineer followed the two Senechi along the passageway.

In the control room Vel Senna felt more relaxed. Soon he would be far away from the goddess. He pointed to the instruments. "Lift ship, Jones."

The engineer frowned. "What — take off, sir?"

"Yes, *human*. Take off."

"Well, sir, if you put it *like* that . . ." The native went up to the controls. Clearly he was better conditioned to obedience than the others.

At the controls Jones reached into a pocket. Out came a heat gun.

He fired into the panels. He did it so casually that Vel Senna stood there and watched him do it.

Under the hissing beam whole banks of instruments melted away. The steering columns collapsed inwards. Vapor rose up from the wreckage, and drops of liquefied metal spattered on the floor. There was a bang as the fuses blew.

"Well, there's a thing," said Jones, as the last controls dissolved. He stopped firing and shook his head.

"I don't know what came over me. I'll start the repairs right away."

Vel Senna drew his whip. "Human, you have immobilized this airship."

"Clever of you to notice." Almost by accident, the gun was now pointing towards the Senechi. "Just by the way, I'm the only one on board who can repair these controls. Unless you want to go back to the valley for my assistants you'd better leave me completely alone."

"The other two here —"

"They cannot help," said Krau Sara. "They are unskilled domestics."

"Quite true," said Jones. "Maisie's a good cook but she's a hopeless engineer. Well, I'll pick up something to start patching up this mess. I might have some part trouble because of the changeover

to Senechi calibration. Still, it's not as bad as it looks. I should rig up something by nightfall." He strolled out. His footsteps receded along the passageway to the equipment stores.

Vel Senna let his whip fall. "I shall definitely kill that human tomorrow."

"Why not now?" suggested Krau Sara. We could ride a sledge back to civilization."

"No, we need him," said Vel Senna. "If we do not return with this airship there will be an inquiry by the Native Relations Board. We cannot stand another investigation."

"So Jones has the advantage?"

"Yes, and he knows it. The natives back at the valley are armed. If we kill Jones and leave, they will pursue us — on sledges or in the airship."

"Can we kill him now? His subordinates will do the work."

"We would have to return to the valley. They might search for the guide until sunset, and then we would have to spend the night here. I do not wish to face the goddess in darkness."

"Neither do I."

"So now we must wait for Jones."

"He's the second native today who has trapped us."

"Yes," said Vel Senna, with rare bitterness. "I shall not forget this day."

The prisoner touched a sapphire hesitantly. It was quite cold again. Around him, the smoke was drifting away as the chamber returned to normal. On the ground lay the fur-clad warrior, still and quiet in defeat. His weapons had disappeared. The prisoner remembered other warriors coming to the cave, all had met the same end.

He had tried to help the stranger, but the end had been inevitable.

His one consolation was the escape of the purple monsters. Only three people had ever escaped before, and two of them had later returned and died. The struggle to free the aliens had been worthwhile. The battle had been hard; jewels were scattered everywhere, and the bursting grenades had printed white smears over the floor. His hands were still raw where his daughter's fury had turned the jewels to fire as he held them. He was amazed that the stranger had fought on for so long.

His daughter stood over the warrior, calm and in control once more. She was not ready to kill the man yet.

"Get up," she said. "What is your name?"

The stranger obeyed slowly. "I'm John Weston," he said. He looked around and saw the skeleton-ships.

Clearly he recognized them.

Watching him, the prisoner realized that this man Weston had known from the beginning what his fate would be. Then the stranger saw him.

"I remember you," said the stranger, "you and the jewels. You called her daughter. Are you her father?"

"I am, God help me."

"What is God?"

A thousand years, thought the prisoner.

"My father is no better than you," said the witch. "He was the first to come after my treasure. Do you know why I keep him alive? To show my son that his ancestors were peasants and thieves. He is the past that Conqueror will destroy."

He was completely in his daughter's power. It was his punishment for bringing her into the world.

"Do you hate your father that much?" asked Weston.

"No," she replied. "He is weak. They were all weak."

The prisoner saw Weston look towards the row of gleaming skeleton-ships.

"You will be one soon."

"I thought so. I've seen them before."

"You have actually seen them?" asked the witch. "Where?"

"In the cave."

"From the air shaft? How did you get out?"

The prisoner was as surprised as his daughter. He had often crawled along the dark tunnel to the pit, but his daughter had always prevented him from climbing out. Other captives had tried it before she killed them, and all had failed.

"We turned round and went back the same way we came," said Weston.

"We? You were not alone?"

"Anna was with me."

"What made you turn round?"

"Mike's signal. I had one end of the rope. He stayed outside, and when he tugged it I knew we had to go back."

"External stimulus," said the witch. "How simple, how ingenious. I shall prevent it in future."

That explained it, thought the prisoner. Anyone entering the air shaft was lured further in by subtle mental suggestions. The signal called Weston back before her automatic conditioning had taken full effect. Perhaps the idea was common, for they had had fewer visitors of late, it seemed.

Ropes! Weston was not alone. There were other men outside with ropes. Perhaps they were still there, thought the prisoner. If he went up to the pit they might be able to pull him out.

The prisoner quickly formed a new plan. When his daughter was fully occupied with Weston he would leave the chamber for the

air shaft. If the men were there they would help him escape. It was his final chance.

"You made a very determined assault on me," his daughter was saying to Weston. "You resisted me for several minutes. What kept you going?"

"I don't know."

Good. She was busy probing Weston's motives for the attack. Presently he would slip away to the shaft. The purple aliens would want to rescue Weston, and they would surely have men stationed up there.

It was hard for him to remember, but these periods of sanity lasted for about a day. He would have ample time to escape.

"I feel guilty about bringing them here," said Weston. "I was hoping all along they'd go inside."

"Why was this?" she asked.

"I hoped they might find our Family Shield."

There were many shields in the cave, mostly dating from before the Ice Age. It was possible that some of them had belonged to the Families, but it did not matter to the prisoner. He had lost interest in shields long ago. Only one thing mattered to him now.

"I see it now," said the witch to Weston. "You are not the first Weston I've killed. There were others. Describe your Shield."

"Rose patterned gold, sapphires dominant upon diamonds in field.

We still use the same design . . ."

Now, thought the prisoner, go now while she's still interested in him.

While they were talking, the prisoner stole away silently past the skeleton-ships. The tunnel led to his private corner — and to the air shaft.

They had not seen him go. He could still hear their voices as he hurried along the dark passage.

"This is the one," said the witch.

Weston looked at the shield she was holding. It was old and battered, with many empty jewel sockets, but he knew the design. It was the ancient device of his Family.

"Yes. It's our Family Shield."

"A man called Endes Weston brought it here. He had already stolen this from his Family, and he came here to steal more."

Other shields lay about the chamber. Most of them were in bad condition, but Weston saw one standing by the Sleeper's bed which was perfect.

"So the blood of Endes Weston still flows. You came here with your purple friends to steal back your Shield. Your greed and your guilt were combined — as in my other Westons."

He did not want to die, but he saw no way to prevent it. She had taken away his will to resist.

Endes Weston must have gone through this same torture three hundred years ago.

"Did you turn my ancestor's bones into a boat?"

"Yes, I use you all. Perhaps I shall put you beside him."

The witch suddenly looked up towards the entrance. She had seen something. Weston turned.

In the chamber stood another woman, also a blonde, but dressed in furs. "Hello there," she said.

Anna Holm!

It was impossible. He had told them not to follow him. But it would have to be Anna, who disobeyed him. Calmly she was walking to them.

"Have you come to die too?" asked the witch.

"Oh no," said Anna. "I've come to give you something."

Weston could only stare at her.

She put her hand into a pocket and brought something out. It was a small watch. Its ticking was loud in the quiet cave.

Anna offered it to the witch. "It's for you. A present from me. Look, it tells you the time."

Time. The watch was ticking away, in a place where time had been forgotten. His own watch had vanished with his weapons. Now here was another.

"Put it away," said the witch, drawing back.

"No, take it," said Anna. "It's yours. You like treasure. The cas-

ing's made of solid gold. Don't you want it?"

Tick, tick. Tick, tock. The witch's eyes were fixed on the moving hands. Seconds passed with no other sound.

Gold isn't any use to me," said Anna. "You can have it, really."

"No," said the witch. "Stop tormenting me!"

"If you don't want it, just pick it up and smash it. I won't mind."

"I cannot touch your gift. The sight and sound of it are terrible. You have made Time move before me."

"What's wrong with that?"

"I make Time stand still."

"I had an idea you did."

The second hand went on round and round, marking off the numbers without pause. The witch looked away.

"Very well. Go from here, and take your watch away."

"And John?"

"Take your man as well."

Anna caught hold of him. "You heard. Come on!"

He was bewildered. "Yes, but —" He pointed to the Weston Family Shield.

Weston hesitated, unable to decide.

"Don't!" cried Anna, jerking at his wrist. "Don't spoil everything now!"

Anna. Trust Anna. Weston allowed himself to be led away. As

he went, he felt the mists inside his head suddenly disappear.

"Don't look back," said Anna. "This way."

"I know," said Weston. "I'm clear again."

"Remember," called the witch, "my son shall conquer you all!"

"Come on," said Anna. "Back to the others!"

They went running out of the chamber, away from the orange light and into the darkness of the tunnel. Weston had a vision of ice, stretching away in endless wastes across half the world. He ran towards the ice. The pale light of the entrance expanded before him, and suddenly he was out of the cave and in the valley. It was wonderful to have open air around him again.

They struggled across the rocky ground to the slope. Anna stumbled on a loose stone; Weston held her firmly.

"I'm all right. You can let go of me now."

"Not yet. You're the only real thing in the valley."

Together he and Anna scrambled up the slope. He saw the captain and the engineers waiting on the skyline. They looked reassuringly solid. They reached down and helped the two of them up onto the ice.

Ice, firm and hard, outside the witch's domain. Weston stamped on it, feeling it crunch underneath

his heel. "Ice," he said. "Nothing to beat it."

"Look," said the captain.

Down in the valley, the witch had come out of the cave. She stood looking up at the little group of people.

Weston found Anna's hand again. "This is where we get out for good. I'm not staying here any longer."

"An extremely sensible point of view," said Captain Zing. He nodded to the engineers. "Right, aboard the sledge. Back to the ship."

The witch was still gazing at them as they sped away. Her face was full of hate.

It was bitterly cold at the bottom of the pit. The prisoner sat against the smooth wall, his eyes closed, his breathing slow. Five meters above him was the ice, a circle of blue sky, and nothing else.

He did not return to the tunnel. His period of sanity was not over yet, and while it lasted he intended to wait in case the men came back. They were his only hope of escape. A thousand years in this valley, he thought, pulling his clothing tighter against the cold. No man could have remained sane throughout such a captivity. The wonder was that the madness ever faded at all.

It was an eternity later that the

prisoner heard the engine. He stood up as the sound of the motor grew louder. The men had returned! He listened intently as the noise gave a final roar and died away. Voices came down to him.

"Stand back!" It was a man speaking and one accustomed to authority. "The witch may have laid a trap since you were here last."

"I'm not worried about her," said a woman. "I just hope the Senechi don't fly off before we get back."

"You leave that to Mike," said another man. "You saw what he did to those controls."

The prisoner recognized the last voice. It was Weston! The man had escaped. Something had happened in the Sleeper's chamber after he left.

"Now," said Weston, "I'm going to the edge. Give me five seconds and then pull me back whatever happens. No, make that three seconds. Ready?"

Suddenly Weston came into view, staring down at the prisoner from the ice high above.

"Help me!" cried the prisoner. "Get me away from here!"

"Stay there!" Weston shouted, and disappeared.

Rescue. In a few moments he would be free. He heard Weston speaking to the others. "Yes, it's the man from the cave. He's there."

"I told you he would be," said the woman. "This is the only place he could have come."

"He was lucky you thought of it," said Weston. "I didn't see him leave the chamber. Ah! Thanks. Fire away."

The prisoner heard a series of ringing metallic blows, seven or eight in all. What were they doing up there? The noise might attract his daughter.

Weston reappeared, accompanied by several other people.

One of the men flung a rope ladder. It hung quivering in front of the prisoner, inviting him to take hold of it. He could see every strand of the rough fibers. Hesitantly he touched it.

The men shouted at him to climb up it.

He put his foot on the first rung and began to climb. He moved very slowly, hardly daring to breathe in his tension. On the third step he felt the old familiar heaviness flowing into his limbs. He knew that her power was still strong.

After six steps he paused, his breathing labored, and he found he could not rise again. The ropes were taut and stretching under the weight of his distorted body. They would break soon. He knew the men watching him, uncomprehending. He hung there on the ladder, not moving, until the ropes parted. He dropped back into the pit.

He lay on the floor, looking upwards at the puzzled faces. They threw him another ladder and urged him to try again, but he shook his head wearily. He would never be able to reach the surface while his daughter possessed him.

One of the men shifted his feet, dislodging a piece of snow. The lump came falling into the pit, but it melted away in the air. The prisoner saw it vanish.

He had to face the truth. His daughter's power never lessened.

This had all happened before, again and again. He had lain here in previous centuries, seeing the anxious people above, knowing their efforts were useless. Now he remembered why Weston's face was familiar in these surroundings. Endes Weston had stood up there, three centuries before. And how many others had tried to rescue him from the pit? All of them had failed. He was fated to remain here until the Sleeper arose.

He was trapped in this fragment of a forgotten summer, beyond the help of any man. Bitterly he called out to them to go away, and presently they did. Their engine started up, fading gradually into the distance until he could no longer hear it. He was left alone.

It always ended like this. He was no better than the birds in the trees, singing the same songs.

Only the people outside were free.

END

THE FAITHFUL MESSENGER

by GEORGE SCITHERS

*The message was urgent! The fate
of empires rested on it — and it
was 14,000,000 years too late!*

A lonely wind whispered across the dead city's harbor, carrying with it a wisp of dust from the dry sea bottom. Jon followed the swirl of dust with his eyes, saw it eddy around the rounded, time-smoothed stones of the crumbled ruins, then drift to the ground as the tired wind died. The Scout looked up; though the local sun stood high, the sky was almost black, and he could make out Deneb. Sol, he knew, was just a few degrees to one side, but too far — much too far — to be seen from here, even through this thin, dry atmosphere.

"Quiet place, isn't it?" asked Jon's partner, tall Rolf.

"Yeah, we're the most excitement

the planet's had since the ocean boiled away."

"Well, you aren't going to have much excitement to match a low-grade nova — I suppose that's what it was. Still — "

Shrill bells sounded. The two men jumped, then ran for their Scoutcraft, a few hundred meters away in the ruins. As they ran, Jon touched his radio, yelled, "I hear ya; alarm acknowledged! What'n space is it?"

"Aerial craft approaching, non-Terran, non-Federation." The Scoutcraft's computer shifted from its flash-message to its emergency tone of voice, continued: "Bearing 80 degrees, elevation 42 degrees; field drive of novel type; broadcast-

HUGO WINNER

George Scithers received his Hugo for the fan magazine (fanzine) he edits, which is called AMRA and is devoted to sword-and-sorcery literature. In addition to being one of our Hugo winners, Scithers is also the author of this month's "first" story, and we look forward to seeing his second and third and many more when he returns from active duty in the Far East.

ing on my radar frequency and apparently attempting to establish contact."

"Voice broadcast?" panted Rolf as he vaulted over a heap of dusty stone.

"Digital signals — establishing a number base — multiplication table — series of prime numbers—shall I attempt to open communication?"

"Yes!" said Jon. He slapped his radio, said "Yes!" again.

"Unknown is apparently computer-directed," the Scoutcraft computer went on in its priority-message tone of voice. "Programming includes a language-learning-and-translation program of extraordinary adaptability."

"Where'n space the thing come from?" panted Jon, remembering to turn on his radio this time. He bounded over a crumbled wall, slid to a stop at the Scoutship's side. "I thought you said there wasn't anything radiating on the whole planet before we landed."

"The unknown was not on planet then," said the computer. "Fascin-

ating translation programming; it will be able to converse with you by the time it arrives."

"You mean, it and us found this planet at exactly the same time? That's — that — " Rolf fell silent, looked up and pointed. "There it is!"

A spot in the sky quickly grew, resolved itself into an oblong, tarnished spacecraft some ten meters long that settled almost to the ground some distance from the two Scouts and their ship. The unknown floated slowly, silently toward them and stopped, still floating, a dozen meters away.

Jon took a step into his Scoutcraft's airlock, hesitated, then stepped back out, staring. The unknown looked like nothing he had ever seen before — too small to be a manned spaceship, too big to be a bomb, too featureless to be an exploratory probe and definitely not a Federation device of any kind. Not that there would have been another Federation device on this planet of Deneb, countless light-years from Earth.

A new voice cut through the thin air.

The unknown asked: "As the Representatives of the Minister of Messages of the Government of Therin 12, will you accept — "

"What in space do you mean?" asked Jon.

"And who or what are you?" asked Rolf.

“I am message 18590047 — I have translated the number from base twelve to your number system — of the Goarrn Region, Message transport Department, of Tarn-Raken, with rush and ordinary messages from the regional center.” The tarnished spacecraft paused, then added, “I am on the Realm’s business.”

“But — but — what happened here?” said Rolf, gesturing at the sere landscape, at the dusty ruin of the dead city.

“Are you sure you aren’t off course?” said Jon.

“Way off course?” asked Rolf. “I’ve never heard of the Realm.”

“Incredible,” muttered the oblong messagecraft. “You are in the very midst of the Realm. Still, it has been a long time — ”

“How long? And what in space happened here?”

“I am not authorized to make astronomical reports or provide irrelevant information,” said the messagecraft, apologetically. “Now: this is the planet Therin, and you *are* only intelligent beings inhabiting thereon, correct?”

“Yes, but — ” said Rolf.

“Therefore, you constitute the Government of Therin 12 and hence, you necessarily encompass the office of Minister of Messages as well. Wherefrom it follows logically that you are authorized to accept messages. Now — ”

“But — ”

“The messages have been too long delayed in delivery; I must deliver them at once. You of course affirm your own secrecy-worthiness; some of the messages are Realm’s Secrets.”

“Well — ”

“As the Government of Therin 12, you obviously can authorize yourselves to receive official messages. Will you accept the messages?”

“Okay, but — ”

“I have,” said the messagecraft, “just now transmitted my messages to your ship’s computer.”

“Printout of the data ready,” said the Scoutcraft computer, via radio. Jon scrambled aboard, found a five-centimeter stack of paper stacked under the ship’s printer.

“I would,” said the tarnished messagecraft as Jon slowly stepped from his ship with an armload of message text, “have given you my messages by voice, only I understand from your ship’s computer that you read faster than you listen. If you will check the messages now? I have translated them, of course, with the data from your computer.”

Jon handed Rolf half the stack of freshly printed paper, then began to read the top page himself.

“Most Urgent, For Delivery In Haste,” began the message. “From WD Goarrn to WD, Therin 12, for readdressal. 17 Third 2,3746. The invasion of the leading edge of the

main spiral by the Confederacy Fleet places the Realm's defense dispositions in serious hazard. Immediate mobilization of the following annex-forces is hereby...." Jon glanced down a page of numerical designations, turned to the next communication, read a fragment: "...loss of six systems in the trailing end of the Goarrn Region makes necessary instant re-transport of auxiliaries and supplies for six again six sub-squadrons for 0.39 years to the far side of the Darker Nebula...." Jon turned to another: "... immediate out-sending of interstellar watch and detection forces on bearing."

Another message directed inventory of ferrous plating. Others sent forces thither, supplies hither, patrols yon. An invasion had swept across an eighth of the galaxy; the Realm and the invaders had been locked in struggle over systems, over whole clusters of stellar systems. But....

Jon looked up from the messages, glanced around. The chill wind swept over dusty ruins, over worn rubble, as it sighed past the age-crumbled city and out across the dusty basin of a long-vanished ocean. Behind Jon, his Scoutcraft glittered, sleek and polished, in the pale sunlight. Ahead of Jon, the tarnished messagecraft of the Realm of Tarn-Raken still floated a half meter above the dusty ground.

"But where—" Jon gestured helplessly, at the time-worn stones, at the dry desolation that surrounded them.

"If you acknowledge receipt and have no traffic for me to store, I must...." began the messagecraft.

"Wait," said Jon. "The Realm—where? And how long? What happened here?"

"I am not authorized to report irrelevant information," said the tarnished, oblong spacecraft. "I—" the machine paused, went on: "I can provide information about message handling only."

"Ha!" said Rolf. "Uh—messagecraft, why were you delayed in delivering these messages?"

"There was a class six nova in the local sun just before my emergence from hyperspeed translation which blew away the atmosphere and oceans of the planet. Since then, I have waited. The present atmosphere gradually seeped from the planet after the sun normaled again." The messagecraft paused, added, "Cause of nova unknown."

"But—there's a message here on the use of nova-inducing weapons by the invaders and a warning—"

"Minister of Messages," said the messagecraft in an immediate-message, somehow shocked tone of voice, "we *never* read the messages with which we are entrusted."

Jon asked, "How long ago?"

"I am not authorized—"

"No, no," said Rolf. "What is the — the time of transmission of these messages?"

"From 13 through 17 Third 2,3746. Were not the beginning times on the messages you received?"

"Yes, but —"

"Then you acknowledge delivery?" asked the messagecraft, floating half a meter higher, as if eager to be off.

"Yes, and what's that in our dating system, and what in space is your hurry?" asked Jon.

"Your computer's data on the secular deceleration of your time-keeping planet's rotation are incomplete for precise extrapolation," said the messagecraft. "However," it continued, while Jon and tall Rolf looked at each other in surprise, "the beginning times in your time-keeping are between about 10 September and 20 October, 14,578, 302."

Rolf gasped, "Fourteen million —"

"B. C.," added the messagecraft, in a calm, routine-message voice. "And since For Delivery In Haste messages require acknowledgment of delivery to be returned to the sender, I must depart immed —"

"But fourteen million years," said Jon. "In that time the Realm of — of —"

"Of Tarn-Raken," said the messagecraft. "Unless you have a message —"

"Yes," said Rolf. "I do have a message: 'Good Luck'."

"And the address?"

"It's for you. Good Luck."

The messagecraft floated a few centimeters lower. "This is very un-regulational and irregular but — but — receipt acknowledged and — and thank you."

The tarnished oblong of metal bobbed once more, then lifted swiftly, silently into the dark sky. In seconds, messagecraft 18590047, was out of sight.

"Over fourteen million years," said Rolf weighing the pile of messages in his arms.

"The Realm of Tarn-Raken must've had the slowest message delivery system in space," said Jon.

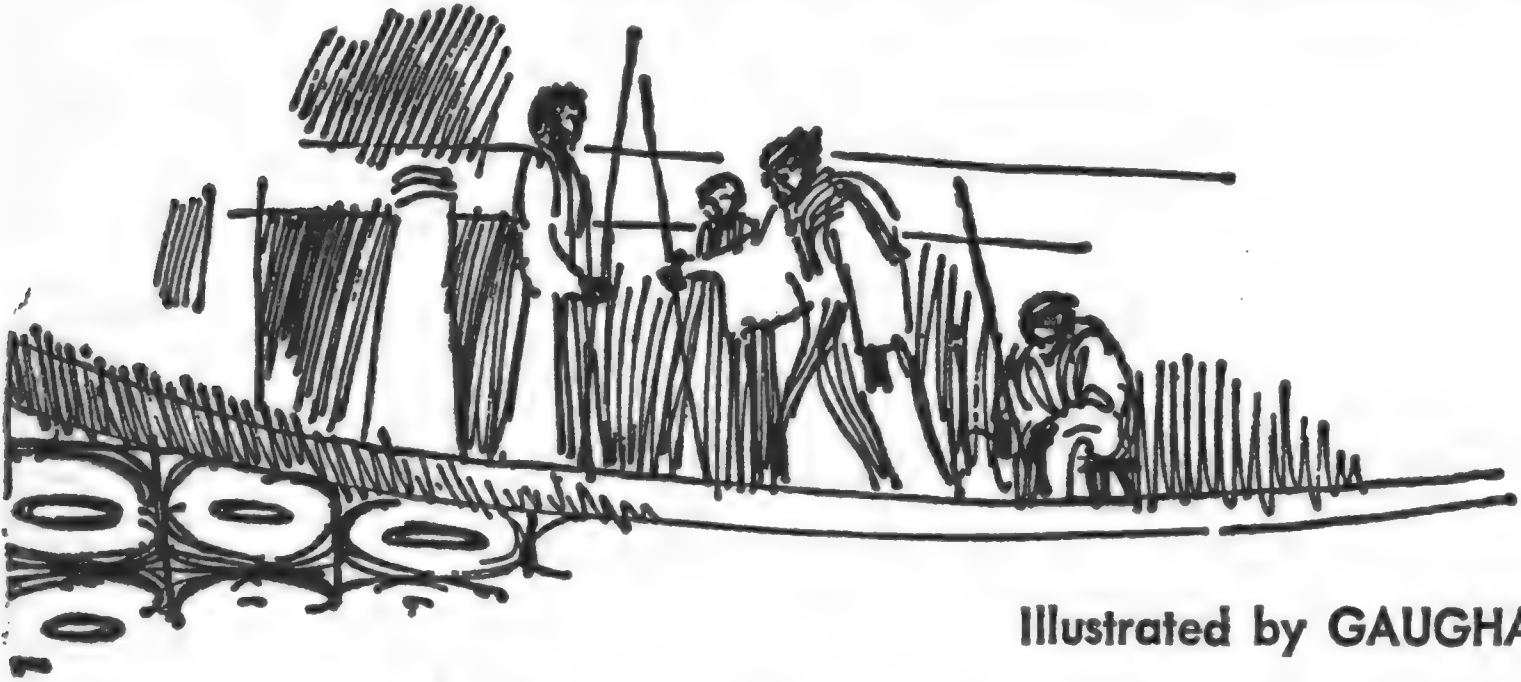
"All of that," agreed Rolf. He looked up toward the empty sky that once had held the mighty, lost empire of Tarn-Raken. "And certainly the most faithful." END

REMEMBER: New subscriptions and changes of address require 5 weeks to process!

ENDFRAY OF THE OFAY

by FRITZ LEIBER





Illustrated by GAUGHAN

*"Beware, all you tyrants! I come
to help the underdogs — no matter
what their color, creed or race!"*

Alerted by their watchmen, who were mostly Seminoles, the Red-Necked Ofays of the Okefinokee Reservation came hurtling out of their soggy holes and nests with such violence that the alligators and water moccasins went hurtling back into theirs. Reptiles can take only so much excitement.

With hoarse cackles of happiness, the emaciated whites and their Red Indian fellow-reservationists floundered about snatching at the little transparent packets of hominy grits, chitterings, and moonshine originally intended for the poor Black trash of Appalachia, but now miraculously diverted and falling like manna from the sweaty southern sky.

Along with the hillbilly ambrosia and nectar, a faint cry haunting as the flight of the flamingo lingered in those same dismal hot heavens: "Compliments of the Endfray of the Ofay!"

The Red-Necked Ofays paused in their snatching to lift a ragged cheer.

This was not the first exploit of the mysterious marauder who had thus far left no clue to his identity except a cry from the sky. Most folks now attributed to him the signs, "Whitey lives!" which a month ago had begun to appear scrawled big in shiversomely daring spots, such as the front wall of the Black House in Memphis. Then a week ago a boisterous party of

Luxor Blacks on a sweep-and-annoy excursion through the Bayous Reservation had had their persons and swamp buggies deluged with Yazoo mud "Courtesy of the Endfray of the Ofay!" Many intellectual and fashionable Blacks had secretly approved this literally dirty trick, since the chivvying and terrorizing of helpless Ofays was beginning to be considered uncouth behavior. Then only yesterday a 17-year-old white concubine of the Caliph of Harlem had been kidnapped by the Endfray and levitated back to her tribe in the Great Barrens Reservation. Reactionary and moralistic Blacks, long detesting the Caliph for his contempt of the strict rules against miscegenation, had openly praised the act. In fact, only the rescued and windblown white girl had been completely unhappy about the whole business. But no Blacks could be expected to approve the food drop, which not only upset the national economy, but also violated the even stricter laws against interfering, by helping the weak, with the divine principle of survival of the fittest.

The Black wardens of the Okefinokee melted with their furious and frightened messages the wires to Memphis, Cairo, Thebes, Luxor (once Vicksburg and Natchez) and the other great Government cities of the American Nile.

Within ten seconds two squadrons of Black Angels based on

HUGO WINNER

Winning this year's Hugo for his novelette "Gonna Roll the Bones," Fritz Leiber added the new trophy to the two he has already won: one in 1958 for his novel **THE BIG TIME** and one in 1965 for his novel **THE WANDERER**.

Karnak had scrambled and another was screaming down through the stratosphere.

At her palatial HQ in Memphis, Her Serene Darkness noted the disturbance and ordered that samples of the food packets be recovered and rushed to her. She did not, nevertheless, shift one black iota of her essential concentration off the great war that was being fought between North America and Africa to Make the World Safe for Black Supremacy, by determining which Blacks really were supreme.

Ten seconds more and all three squadrons of Black Angels were reversing course west as quickly as their already great velocity would permit, and then shifting into overdrive.

Word had come that there had been another drop of mysteriously diverted viands — this time on the Death Valley Reservation of the Bearded and Beaded Ofays.

Once again there had come that weird cry from the sky: "Compliments of the Endfray of the Ofay!"

Along with the packets of fruit and saffron-tinted, precooked rice

and vegetables, there were falling foam - packaged Tibetan prayer wheels, smuggled no man might say how through the Nirvana Screen.

The starving descendants of ancient hippies, beats, cultists and movie moguls had come boiling up out of the furnace-hot mouths of *their* caves and holes. Even outside the reservations, holes were a popular residence in those exciting times when Black atom bombs were in the air and when all mankind was preoccupied, to a degree at least equal to his interest in space, with Earth's molten, slow-churning mantle, rich in mohole-minable radioactivities and also a source of strange and mighty powers when properly tickled by CDEF (Coleman - Dufresne Electrogravitomagnetic Fields) or by magic spells. For in the new world sorcery and science walked arm in arm, sometimes so closely that none might tell which was which, or who was holding the other up. And the density and darkness of Earth's interior suited the Black Age. Russia, which ever since Dostoyevsky Day had shifted her fundamentally introspective and peasant interests from the sky to the East European plains and Siberian steppes, had used CDEF (and possibly some Tungu chants) to carry by slow convection and concentrate vast subcritical masses of fissionable radioactivities underneath all the world's continents. Increased CDEF tick-

ling would produce unimaginably destructive earthquakes — the so-called mantle bombs that were the USSR's doomsday answer to aggression. Africa and North America utilized the same methods to enrich the radioactivities they took from their mohole mines. Australia had employed CDEF and bone-pointing Aboriginal magic to accelerate continental drift, so that the great down-under island, shoving Tasmania before it, was now separated from Antarctica by only a narrow strait. Australia enjoyed a Canadian climate and was hemmed by extremely rich fisheries. While the great Buddhist hegemony of Sino-India had used CDEF (possibly) and yoga and zen (certainly) to create the Nirvana Screen.

In response to the echoing cry from the dry sky, the Beaded and Bearded Ofays touched fingertips to foreheads and briefly meditated their gratitude.

In the fringes of her awareness, Her Serene Darkness noted this food-drop also, and she gave the same order.

Over the Pacific, a tiny westward - speeding vehicle reversed course instantaneously, and so of course without circling, to return momentarily to a point over Death Valley and shout down, "The Endfray thanks you for your prayers."

The Ofays below rejoiced, while by the psionic grapevine that tenuously links unfortunates, a little

hope was kindled in the Swarthy Ofays of the Chihuahua Reservation, the Stunted Ofays of the Jersey Flats, the Giant Ofays of the Panhandle Reservation, the Long-Haired Ofays of the Tules, and even in the Wild or Unfenced Honkies of the Rocky Mountains, the Black Hills, and the Badlands.

The Endfray's linear loop wasted enough time to let the Black Angels zero in on him, her, it or them, with their radars and telescopes. With hardly a millisecond's delay, they aimed and activated their deadly lasers, rocket bombs and constriction fields.

The Endfray went zigzagging west again just in time. His evasive tactics were masterly. He seemed able to anticipate each move of his pursuers. Mini-atomics burst into searing violet spheres about him, red laser-needles lanced past him, space itself was squeezed and wrenched, but he bobbed along unharmed like a Ping-pong ball in a tornado.

For an instant one Black Angel telescoped him clearly. The fleeing vehicle was incredibly tiny, the size and shape of a chunky dwarf's spacesuit, snow white in hue, and across it went the red letters "Endfray of the Ofay." There were no jets or antennae. It flashed out of sight perhaps a microsecond before a laser pierced the space it had occupied.

Yet despite or perhaps because of the Endfray's ingenious doublings and dartings, the Black Angels were gaining on him. He veered south, but Australia sent up a line of warning star rockets. He veered north, but when he neared the moored, melancholy black balloons marking the Russian border, they moaned, "Nyet, nyet," at him and he once more reversed course and sought the Equator.

The blue of the sky ahead became grainy and glittering like a holograph. It extended down to sea level, blotting out Borneo and the western shore of Celebes.

Without hesitation the Endfray plunged, at precisely 120 degrees east longitude, into the Nirvana Screen.

Chanting their fatalistic death chants, the pilots of the Black Angels sent their slim ebon ships after him.

Without perceptible passage of time, pursued and pursuers emerged over the Indian Ocean at 60 degrees east longitude.

The same thing would have happened in reverse if they had been traveling east, or at 45 degrees north latitude and the Equator if they had been traveling along a north-south vector. It was the Orient's master mystery, greater than the rope trick. Truth to tell, no one outside knew for sure whether India and China still existed inside the Nirvana Screen, or not. Explana-

tions ran the gamut from spacewarp to mass hypnosis and the Nigerian null-spell. While what the super-scientific and/or superphysic Bud-dists of the Fourth Dimensional Path might do if they ever came out, chilled even Earth's blackest blood.

Africa loomed, the continent that was the home of the biggest animals, the biggest magics and the biggest bombs in the world. The Endfray climbed steeply. Already at greater altitude, the Black Angels rode the hypotenuse of a collision course.

Ninety miles from intercept, magnibombs mashed the stratosphere everywhere around the Endfray and coalesced into one massive incandescence.

Veering off with hardly nanoseconds to spare, the Black Angels' wing commander bounced home his message off the most convenient orbital relay: "Target destroyed by African antispacecraft fire."

But before it was received at Memphis, there was dropping on the Fierce Fuzzy, or Bluecoated Ofays of the Chicago Craters Reservation, a shower of packeted food — wienerschnitzel, corned beef and cabbage, Irish whisky, beer — and foam-crated roller skates, the latter diverted from a shipment intended for the great gladiatorial ring at Cairo. While down the slants of rain from the dismal sky

there resounded, "Compliments of the Endfray of the Ofay!"

No one knew why the Chicago Craters Ofays were called fuzzy, or simply referred to as "the fuzz," since all of them were totally bald from residual radioactivity. It was one of recent history's many mysteries, about which thought was discouraged. But anyone could figure out that roller skates would be an excellent means of transportation on crater glass. And by now everyone, Black or White, knew that the Endfray was an impudent and unbearable affront to absolute authority.

Her Serene Darkness made a decision and took her mind completely off the war. She could safely do this because her uncles were good generals and because her psionic intelligence organization was the world's best, with vast powers of telepathy, clairvoyance, clairaudience, telekinesis and teleportation, from the orbiting espers each shut-eyed in her capsule to the Blacks in Blackness: whole psionic families which had lived for generations in deep-buried, absolutely anechoic, a-optical psi-spy-proof environments, their only connections with the upper world being inbound nutrient-pipes and oxypipes and quartz-cable ultraviolet conductors and outbound waste-pipes and report lines. Psionic Intelligence's chief task was to spot and course-chart bombs lobbed over from Africa and

up from Argentina and Brazil, where Africa had an enormous beachhead, and then either turn them back by telekinising their controls, or else guide atomic interceptors to them. Her Darkness was certain that her espers were the world's finest because she had been their working chief before taking over her largely conscious, nonpsi-
onic imperial duties.

Now like an arboreal black leopard — slim, flashing-eyed and dangerous — she gazed down the Watusi-Hottentot gap between her and her pages.

"Summon me my psychiawitches and sorceresps," she commanded.

The patter of sprinting bare feet faded from the tessellated floor, which was a great, diagrammatic map of Earth and the spaces around. Turning her beautiful, small head on her slender, long neck, Her Darkness gazed out between the narrow pillars of Vermont marble fretted with California gold at the rippling blue Mississippi, and she meditated.

A page entered and knelt to her, lifting a golden tray on which gleamed glassy packets, samples from the Endfray's food-drops. She silently indicated where to set it.

A tall, glossy warrior in HQ harness folded his arms in the Communications doorway and intoned, "Acapulco, Halifax and Port of Spain have sustained med-

ium to severe damage from nuclear near-misses. Our rockets intercepted, but not in good time. Orbital warnings on the three African attacks were late and inadequate."

"What from the Blacks in Blackness?" Her Serenity inquired.

"No warning whatever from that quarter."

She nodded dismissal and returned to her meditations.

Yet it seemed hardly picoseconds before the Presence Pavilion was once more full and silent, except for the faint susurrus of the most respectful breathing and the pounding of frightened hearts.

Slowly, one by one, Her Darkness gave her assembled psychiawitches and sorceresps the leopard look which her populace expected of her and loved, especially when they did not have to face it.

Those gathered in the pavilion were almost as tall as she and even more gorgeously clad, but they crouched away from her and ducked their heads like terrified children.

Then she asked in a voice that set them shivering, "Why is our newest and insolentest enemy uncaught by you, nay, unreported even," and without waiting for an answer commanded, "Read me the mind of the Endfray. Ice it and slice it, dice it and rice it. Skewer him in space, nail him in time.

Sound him from his lowest note to the top of his compass. Tell me his source, his nature and his fate."

Instantly a sorceresp of the Seventh Rank babbled, "He is a dwarf white trained and equipped in a secret laboratory in a branch of the Carlsbad Caverns underlying the White Sands Reservation of the Bulge-Brained Ofays. His aim, unquestionably, is the fomenting of an Ofay revolt, a Honky insurrection. He is now hovering seventeen miles above Aswan - St. Paul."

Without intervening pause, the Second Psychiawitch chittered, "He is an African agent of Pygmy extraction, a marauder skilled in teleportation and telepathy. His means of aerial locomotion is a deceit; he uses slowed-down teleportation, not speeded-up field flight. Under cover of the magnibomb blast, he landed unharmed in the territory of our hateful enemies and is now making report to His Terrible Tenebrosity in his shelter-palace beneath Mogadishu."

"The Endfray is not one, but many," another took up. "He is radioactive atoms over the Somali coast. He also speeds east intact over Old Cleveland on the Dead Sea. Another of these duplicates —"

"By Bast and by Ptah, the Endfray is extraterrestrial," yet another cut in. "A seven-tentacled amphibian from the fourth planet

of pulsing Altair, he is the fore-runner of an invasion which —"

"By Serapis and Harpocrates, she is an Indian witch, sister to Kali, able to penetrate the Nirvana Screen and let others through. She —"

"The Endfray is a group-minded nation of Black Martian Ants. Only such tiny creatures could survive the changes of momentum that —"

"The Endfray is a fantasml That's why no material weapon can —"

"That'll be enough!" interposed Her Serene Darkness. "When I want improvisations, I'll summon me my artists." The faint, jeering notes of an electronic calliope on a distant pleasure barge seemed an overtone of her scornful contralto voice. "Facts I desire. Where is the Endfray? Take scent and search!" And picking up the gold tray, she scattered its contents across the room in one sweep.

The soaring, transparent food-packets were snatched, sniffed, fingered, held to ear and forehead, passed hand to hand. There were faint growlings and eager whimperings as the assembly transformed into a pack.

Her Serenity directed, "Each search that part of earth or space on which she stands," referring to the diagrammatic floor map. "Let not one oozy sea cranny or fissure

of damp clay cave be overlooked, and forget not the far side of the moon. Except you...and you," she added, beckoning the First Psychiawitch and also the sorceresp of the Seventh Rank who had been first to answer. "The rest, to work!"

"How many minutes have we for our task?" the Second Psychiawitch ventured. The eyes of most of the others had already closed or gone blank as the minds behind them clairvoyantly scanned.

"I give you each one hundred seconds." Then, turning to the Seventh-Rank sorceresp, "You spoke of an Ofay revolt. Where? When?"

"One is planned, Your Darkness. It will begin in Los Alamos and be timed to coincide with an all-out African assault ordered by His Terrible Tenebrosity."

"Ridiculous!" the First Psychiawitch interjected in a whisper. "Not even His Idiocy would be so stupid as to think the reservation Ofays might be roused to helpful revolution, or the wild Honkies organized for any purpose. Nor would even His Vileness stoop to use such foul and tawdry means."

In the Communications doorway there appeared a warrior, impassive but white-eyed. Her Serenity showed him her finger. He intoned, "The Blacks in Blackness report that Africa has launched from Casablanca a vehicle with a two-hundred-million-pound first-stage thrust. Window clouds sur-

round it. Its course bends west."

"Two hundred million?"

"Aye. Ten times that of any known Afric or Americ launching vehicle."

"It is the revolt-sign!" the Seventh-Rank sorceresp wailed.

"From its size, it's more likely itself our death-sign, if our interceptors let it get over our land," the First Psychiawitch remarked coolly.

"Silence," Her Darkness said, not unkindly. Then, to the room, "The hundred seconds are up. Where is the Endfray?"

In the hundred and seventy-odd faces, eyes opened and/or came alive with spirit, looking toward Her Serenity with a professional confidence which, as the seconds passed and not one of them spoke, transformed, again into fear.

"Has any one of you not completed search?" Her Darkness inquired. "Or failed to make it as thorough as I commanded?"

Heads rotated from side to side. Lips formed, "No."

"Then the Endfray is nowhere," the First Psychiawitch whispered in a voice that was not meant to carry, but did.

One cried, "It is as I said. He is a fantasm, invisible to psionic search."

"No, it is as I said!" another took up. "He is from Altair, and returned there in the twinkling of

a self-teleportive thought. We have not searched Altair, only space out to Pluto."

"When the possible seems to fail, only weak brains grasp at the impossible," Her Serenity interposed. "Stellar teleportation takes perceptible time and leaves perceptible clues, as you well know. While fantasms make no teleportive food-drops and leave no psychic scent. No, to solve our problem we must use an apothegm of Sherlock Holmes."

Eyes grew puzzled, while the First Psychiawitch murmured, "Who is that?"

"Sherlock Holmes was a Cryptoblack of vast deductive intelligence, who lived in — " Her Darkness rapidly starred herself, moving fingertips to the seven cardinal points — "the Tabooed Times."

Everyone else copied Her Darkness and starred herself at once, to ward off any ill hap which might come from mention of a forbidden area of the continuum.

Her Serenity continued, "The Sherlockian apothegm I have in mind is this: when all other explanations are proven false, then the least likely explanation must be the true one. You have not searched *all* of habitable Earth and Solar space."

The psychiatrist standing on Memphis said hesitantly, "But, begging Your Serenity's pardon, I have searched every closet of your

secret quarters, including the apartments housing your harem and your laboratories of magic and the vault guarding your secret fortune."

"It is well that you have," Her Darkness replied, smiling most dangerously. "But those are not the sole forbidden or esp-proof volumes of Earth."

"You are thinking of the mantle and core?" one asked.

"I said, 'habitable,'" Her Darkness snapped. "Can you not guess the other spot I have in mind?"

A sorceresp standing just south of Louisville cried out, "I scent the Endfray over Bowling Green! His vector, southwest by west. He speeds. Already he overpasses Clarksville."

The psychiawitch standing between her and the one on Memphis took up with, "And now I catch his scent in turn. He comes on fast. He is over Paris, Milan, Bells, Brownsville, Covington — "

"And now — " the one on Memphis began.

The air screamed. The gold-chased pillars shook, and the purple silken awning snapped and flapped as something white flashed through the pavilion, tumbling by its blast everyone but Her Serenity.

The scream, which had abruptly dropped in pitch as the disturbance went by, and then faded somewhat, now rose again in pitch and volume.

"He returns to buzz us once

more," the First Psychiawitch gasped from the floor.

Her Dark Serenity — hair unspiraled and straight on end, eyes like a mad tiger's, fists clenched, knees bent, slender feet a-stamp — incanted rapidly,

"Null Kull, null Rull,
Null time, null space,
Null motion and null Grace.
By Hanged Man, Spades, and
Lovers

Be winged-clogged, all that
hovers.

Paralysis know, and fear — "

The screaming knifed. The pillars began to shake. Something white —

" — And 'drop down here!"

Something white lay on the tessellated floor — a squat and rigid spacesuit like a white oil drum with stubby cylindrical arms and legs, but windowless and without sign of head.

Her Serenity drew and expelled three gasping but controlled breaths. Her hair recurled with faintest rustlings. Those around craned, leaned in, and peered, though without rising fully from the floor where they had been sent sprawling.

Holding out her right hand prone, Her Serenity commanded, "Arise!"
Like the reversed motion picture

of a rigid fall, the white spacesuit swung erect as if its heels were hinged to the floor.

"Emerge!" Her Serenity continued.

The suit did not open, but out of it, as if walking through a white wall, there stepped a handsome black boy who looked nine years old. He wore a loincloth. Though his eyes were shut tight, his face was animated, and he smiled as he looked up.

"My Empress — " he began.

Her slender hands, snaking forward to capture him, clamped tight on air.

A chuckle came from the far end of the pavilion, where the black boy had rematerialized midway between awning and floor. Heads switched around to watch him where he stood on air.

Two sorceresp pointed at him, the one a wand, the other a yellow thighbone.

Three warriors appeared at the Force door, bearing silvery, cone-nosed hand weapons. Her Darkness snapped her fingers.

Still shut-eyed, the black boy chuckled again. The three warriors swayed like ticked bowling pins, arms tight to sides, legs tight together, bound by the constriction fields their weapons had projected backfiring on them. While pointed wand and thighbone hung limp as cooked spaghetti from the hands of the sorceresp.

"Any more games?" the black boy inquired hopefully. If he'd been chubbier, he'd have seemed like a wingless cupid.

"Who are you?" Her Darkness demanded far more coolly than she felt.

"The Endfray, of course, Empress," he replied, looking at her as directly as if his eyes had been open. "At your service, providing — I humbly beg your pardon — the service suits me."

"Yet you have helped the Honkies, aided the Ofays—why?" Her Darkness asked automatically. She was still half in shock.

The Endfray's grin widened and he quirked his face. Finally, "Just for fun," he said. "No, that's not true. Fact is, you see, I like stories of wars and battles, and —"

"As any young Black should," Her Serenity interrupted approvingly. She was regaining her sense of command, and her mind was beginning to work again.

At her feet the First Psychiawitch took fire from her and cried out, "Indeed yes! Brave battles! Complete courage! Stark strength! Merciless might! Violence and victory!"

The Endfray hung his head. His expression became an odd mixture of embarrassment and defiance. "But you see, Empress, I always like the losing side best. Being with the winners is no fun. But siding with the losers, when all the odds

are against them — And you got to admit, it's hard to imagine a losing side than the Ofays."

"Accommodation! Tomism! Honky-love!" the Second Psychiawitch cried scandalized.

"Don't you know the first sign of high intelligence is the faculty of violence?" the First Psychiawitch demanded.

"Inside the Nirvana Screen, they think it's the ability to sit still," the Endfray countered.

"Strength is virtue. Weakness is sin," the Leading Sorceresp chanted.

"But you got to remember we were the losingest once, we were the weak ones, we —" the Endfray continued stubbornly, but his voice was drowned in cries of horror at his unprefaced and unstarred reference to the Tabooed Times.

The warrior appearing at the Communications doorway did not stand on ceremony, but roared over the din, "Our psionic trackers have lost touch with the African super-missile south of the Azores! The Blacks in Blackness have broken off their reports."

There was shocked silence, in which the Endfray's voice sounded out clearly. His grin was gone. "Yes," he said, "and now, big as a metal moon, it's approaching Bermuda. Our interceptors rise to destroy it. Counter-missiles shoot from it and become balls of white flame. Our interceptors puff into

nothingness. It still comes on."

The Leading Sorceress pointed at him a shaking arm. "He is an African agent," she screeched, "sent to disrupt our counsels at this moment of crisis."

"That's not true, Empress," the Endfray protested. "I've stuck with America because *we* are the losingest side of this war. We are the weak ones. Africa's going to win, unless I —"

Once again his voice was lost, this time in a din of outrage that broke off only when Her Dark Serenity threw up her arms and cried, "Fools! Have you not yet guessed who the Endfray is? Have you not yet solved the Sherlockian riddle? The only spot you haven't psionically searched is psi-proof Mammoth Cave, immemorial home of the Blacks in Blackness and just by Bowling Green. He is clearly one of them, and their best tracker too, highest product of our breeding for psionicity. When he was out on his mad mission to the Ofays, three bombs got through. When he returned home and you could not find him, we got reports on the launching of the African super-missile. When he started here, those reports stopped. And did it not occur to you that he keeps his eyes shut because he has never before been in an environment of optical light? You are all idiots! Endfray, how goes it?"

"The big one zoomed in over

Savannah and Macon. Its last counter-missiles blasted those of our coastal and backup defenses. Ten seconds ago it was about to break up over Birmingham and shower all the cities of the Nile with a hundred hydrogen heads."

"Was?"

"Of course, 'was,' Empress. While all these here were squawking, I jiggered its controls and put it into a permanent 93-minute circular orbit around Terra. I'm going to keep it there too. I'm sorry, Empress, but in spite of you being very bright and right about me, I don't trust you with that big a bomb. Or His Terrible Tenebrosity, of course. War's romantic, but destruction's too realistic."

Her Darkness turned on him. "You have your nerve!"

His embarrassment returned. "I told you I'm sorry, Empress."

She paused and turned toward the Communications doorway, where a warrior had appeared. "The super-missile still speeds west," he rapped out. "Twenty of our interceptors have risen from Colorado Springs and thirty from Frisco to destroy it."

"Imbeciles! Would you break it up, to do destruction, while it is still over our continent?"

"Don't worry, Empress," the Endfray said.

A second warrior appeared behind the first. "Our fifty interceptors have escaped control and formed

themselves into two goose wings slanting back from the super-missile. Their radar blips are unmistakable."

The Endfray grinned. "And now, my Empress, I got to be going. That flock needs looking after."

A third warrior appeared behind the second. "A bliplet, tiny but unmistakable, has added itself to the fifty blips and one superblip."

"We know," Her Dark Serenity said a shade wearily, waving her hand in dismissal. Then, to the First Psychiawitch, who was at last pushing herself up from the floor, "What exactly, Sister, means the word Endfray?"

"O Your Dread Serenity," the other replied, "now that the taboos are lifting, it comes to me. I take it to be a word of Swine Roman, or Pig Latin if you prefer, a secret language of the Evil Days when Satan-Dis-Ahriman ruled. It was formed from English by putting the last part of a word first and then adding a long A. Even as Ofay means foe, Endfray means friend."

"Friend of the Foe," Her darkness intoned tiredly "I might have deduced all from his name alone." Her eyebrows lifted. "Or Ender of the Fray. Frayender."

"However you name him, he appears to have a lost-cause fixation and a comics-books mentality," the First Psychiawitch intellectualized.

"Stop," Her Serenity protested,

raising a listless palm. "We've heard enough about Honkles for today. Dismiss all."

Russia noted the super-bomb orbiting with its entourage and set off a warning earthquake that quivered all Antarctica. Australia in turn dropped in the Bering Sea a warning bomb that upset a sealer and sent small a tsunami foaming over the beaches of Kamchatka.

But that night the Ofays in their reservations went to sleep for the first time in a century with hope and even a little confidence in their hearts. Someone cared.

Next day North America and Africa agreed to a bombing halt. It was madness to continue a war which only built up the Endfray's orbiting armory. They diverted all their research — scientific, psionic and sorcerous — to a hunt for a means of knocking the Endfray out of the high sky. But secretly Her Dark Serenity decided that he would make her ideal successor. She pondered plans to win him over. So did his terrible Tenebrosity.

The Endfray turned his major attention to the plight of the Untouchables behind the Nirvana Screen. There was a cause even more lost than that of the Ofays.

And he still had, for a lost-cause ace in the hole, the Boers and other white trash of the Blancostans and concentration camps of Rhodesia and South Africa.

END

SABOTEUR

by TED WHITE

Illustrated by BARR

*He could see that the world was
doomed to chaos, and the only
hope was to speed the process!*

I

Mark Redwing, a lean, dark man of less than average height, slipped the mimeograph stencil from his typewriter and gazed at it with admiration.

A shadow fell on the frosted glass door of his small office, the

door opened, and the legend "A & L Expeditors" was revealed. Then the woman had entered and closed the door behind her.

Redwing's features lit with a saturnine expression. "Listen to this, Linda—I really love this! Listen: 'The time has come and passed for idle contemplation. We

cannot remain silent, inactive. We can no longer tolerate wholesale witchhunts and the persecution of our membership by fascist hate-groups. The Emergency Committee for the Defense of Gus Wilson sees no other alternative to that of drastic, immediate action! Now is the time!" He chuckled. "I've thrown in every radical political cliché I could think of. How does that strike you? Anything I've missed?"

Linda shook her head. "That should shake them up on both fronts, all right. And I guess you're ready for these." She set down the package she'd been carrying and unwrapped it. It was a box of fresh letterheads.

"Let's see one," said Mark, reaching. He held it up to the light, then pulled open his top desk drawer and took out a second sheet. He compared the two, ran his finger over the printing on the fresh one, and nodded his approval. "Very nice, nearly identical. A good job, a fine job of printing."

"I'd just as soon not go back there though," Linda said. She shrugged from her suit jacket and hung it neatly beside the door. "It's one of those shops where you just know they're not meeting their overhead with legitimate work. I feel a little crawly every time I'm in there."

"But they're cheap, and they ask no questions," Mark said, dismiss-

HUGO WINNER

Ted White, a long-time fan, was honored with a Hugo for his many distinguished articles and controversial contributions to various fan magazines. Mr. White has also functioned as a professional sf editor and writer. In 1967 he was co-chairman of the World Science Fiction Convention, held in New York City.

sing the complaint. "Here's the stencil. Set it up and start running them off. I want to start them into circulation by this afternoon."

The cream phone rang. Linda scooped it up on the first ring. "A and L."

She extended the phone to Redwing. "For you, 'Mister Lewis.'"

He took the phone. "Lewis here." There was a long pause. He grunted several times, then replaced the receiver. "Everything's moving along smoothly," he said. "The bus company found the bomb in Boston in plenty of time."

While Linda took the plastic cover off the desktop mimeograph, Redwing moved to the wall of filing cabinets. From one file he pulled an envelope. He returned to his desk with it.

From a lower desk drawer he took a sheet of unwatermarked, Woolworth's sulfite typing bond and rolled it into his typewriter. His hands paused, momentarily, over the keyboard, and then began rattling out the brief message:

This is our last warning. You have until Thursday the 21st to publish your agreement in the personals section of the New York Times. The enclosed is a reminder that your time is running out.

From the envelope he removed a sheaf of snapshots. There were several different shots. Each in quadruplicate. All showed a nearly identical scene; they must have been taken in quick succession. The subjects were two men. One was past his middle age. His face was clearly visible. It was a face which had been well known for over a quarter of a century, the face of a man who, by Presidential dispensation, still held his high governmental post long after the mandatory retirement age. The other was a young man. Both were nude.

Redwing selected one of the snapshots and laid it on his desk while he neatly folded his brief letter into thirds and then inserted both in a business envelope. A carbon went into the file, along with the envelope of remaining photographs.

"Any of those things run off yet?" he asked Linda.

She stopped the clacketing mimeograph and passed him a small stack of sheets. "Most of them are run off, Boss," she said. "Here's the first twenty or thirty."



"Good," he grunted. He dropped them to the floor. They slipped and fluttered until they were blanketing the floor around his feet. He did not bend to retrieve them. Instead he began walking on them, wiping his feet on them, scuffling them as he might a doormat.

When he was satisfied with the results, he picked them up and shuffled them into an untidy pile on his desk. From another file drawer he removed a set of letters and envelopes. Some of the letters were typed — on demonstration machines in Macy's — and some were hand-scrawled. The latter had cost an average of fifty cents apiece and had been written with careful effort by the winos and derelicts he had found when he had spent an afternoon three months earlier wandering from Union Square down Fourth Avenue to the Bowery. The paper used for the different letters was a motley variety, ranging from monogrammed sheets in odd sizes and tints to lined paper torn from a pad.

The top letter was typewritten. It said, "Dear Sirs. I found this crazy paper on the street and I think its disgracefull and you out to do something about it right-away." Redwing folded it together with one of the footprinted mimeographed sheets, and inserted them both in an envelope addressed to

"The Justice Department, Washington DC."

The other letters were similar in sentiment. They were addressed to congressmen and senators, with varying accuracy, as well as to a number of governmental agencies, including the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. Meticulously, Redwing folded the dirty sheets with their indignant letters and sealed them into their respective envelopes.

"This evening, Linda, I want you to take five of these out to Brooklyn with you and mail them in boxes in different zones. They have return addresses — you can post them nearby."

Linda shrugged. "There goes my evening, just driving around. Couldn't they all just have mailed them in Grand Central Station on their way home?"

"You can take off an hour early," Redwing said.

That morning Redwing and his secretary folded and stuffed over five hundred of the form letters — undirtied this time — into envelopes addressed to major names of every political denomination: Liberal, Reform Democrat, Socialist, Socialist Worker, Republican, Democrat, Young Republican, Youth Against War and Fascism, Dixiecrat, the Anti-Defamation League, CORE, SNCC, the American Nazi Party, the John Birch Society, Jewish leaders, leaders of

the New Left, KKKlansmen, Bible Belt patriots.

"Who is this Gus Wilson, anyway?" Linda asked at one point.

Redwing flapped a dozen more envelopes. "Head of a trade union. Suspected of strong leftist leanings. This letter should clinch it. Right now he's testifying before the Senate Labor Relations Subcommittee. He's not putting on too good a show, and there's been a few demonstrations on his behalf. There's an emergency committee set up to collect funds for his defense; they've already cut him off from the union war chest. The union's about ready to dump him. This letter should help."

"But, if he's already on the way out — ?"

"Why go after him?" Redwing smiled. There was no warmth in his smile. "Chaos. This should muddy things up a little. It should embarrass a lot of people. It's too pat; somebody on the emergency defense committee will catch the blame. A saboteur. Disunity will erupt. And of course that's the prelude for our campaign against the unions. I'm setting it up for the wolves."

At noon Redwing loaded the neatly addressed envelopes into his attaché case and took them to Grand Central Station, where he posted them before heading up Park Avenue to his private club for luncheon.

SABOTEUR

II

"Hello, Mark," Chester Folkes said a shade too eagerly. Redwing stifled his inward impulse. An aroma of blended deodorant, hair cream, after-shave lotion and month wash assailed him; he wanted to wrinkle his nose in disgust and turn his back. Folkes was, at something less than thirty, already neatly preserved in all the proper embalming agents. His sandy hair was too thin, but brushed impeccably in place and held there as if lacquered. His shining face had a pinkness that would never become ruddy. His outstretched hand was so plump that his knuckles were dimpled. And it was because of these qualities and the others they all too accurately suggested that Redwing had decided immediately that Folkes would be useful. He had let the man cultivate him.

"Share my table?" Folkes asked, his hand still out.

"Certainly, Chet," Redwing said warmly. "Just let me get washed up first." He turned as if not noticing Folkes's limp gesture. His hands were itching badly now, and he needed to remove the transparent rubber surgical gloves he always wore in the A & L office. Once in the washroom he could soak his hands for a few minutes before talcing them.

Once seated at Folkes's table in the dining room, he took a deep

breath, held it for the count of ten, let it out slowly, and smiled warmly at his erstwhile companion.

"How's the work coming, Mark?" Chester asked effusively. "I hear Ford just renewed your grant."

Redwing nodded. "They did. We're in the midst of a very promising line of research."

"Is that right?" Folkes said. "You know, I don't believe you've ever told me much about your project."

"That's true," Redwing agreed. He glanced down the menu.

"Something to do with politics, isn't it?" Folkes asked.

"Group dynamics," Redwing said. "A very rough science. We're still in the early stages of setting things up in terms that can be programmed, and I don't anticipate full-scale application of our findings for use in political prediction for another, oh, ten years yet."

"Group dynamics, eh?" Folkes said, trying to sound both knowledgeable and curious.

"The behavior of groups, you might say," Redwing amplified. "There's a strong analogy to atomic physics. An individual electron is pretty unpredictable, but statistically you know exactly what they'll do. Human beings are an individualistic lot, taken one by one. But group behavior is another story. Mob psychology, political action; if you can peg down enough of the variables, you can rough out

a workable equation. Right now, we're still working with the rudiments, but if our present research pans out, we'll be a long way toward a genuine political science."

"Well, that's marvelous, I must say! Just marvelous! You know, I certainly am amazed at all the things they're doing with science these days. Why, it seems only yesterday we hadn't even men on the moon, and now we've not only got them on Mars, but flatwall color TV, and —"

"And the Russians have bases on Mars too, as well as their own positron bomb," Redwing said. His voice dropped and became more intense. "It's unfortunate that they had to be first, but that's the breaks, huh? Of course we really don't have to be afraid of the Russians these days, anyway, but it is a little scary to realize that once every eighteen hours a Chinese space station passes over our country, isn't it? Some people have trouble sleeping when they get to speculating over how close the Chinese are to the positron bomb, now that they have the delivery system. But that's progress, I guess. You can't stop progress."

Folkes looked up sharply from his meal. "What's that, Mark? Who'd want to stop progress?"

Redwing smiled. It was a feline expression, and it seemed to transfix Folkes's widened eyes. "Have

you ever wondered?" he asked. "Consider this. Fifty years ago, this club — he gestured about him at the teak-paneled walls and somber hues, the obsequious staff and wealthy clubmen — "would never have admitted an American Indian to its sacrosanct rooms. And many still grumble at the thought. Would you have their whole way of life disturbed?"

Folkes tried to chuckle at what he sensed must be the joke. "But, Mark — fifty years ago, how many Indians had . . ." His voice seemed to lose all impetus and trickle off as he realized what he was saying.

"Hit oil, made their mint, cast off their loin cloths, and come off the reservation?" Redwing asked, finishing the question for him. "Not many, I'm sure, Chester. It's a sign of changing times. Sometimes change is not fully appreciated. Sometimes it shakes somnambulent men from their quiet slumbers with the threat of extinction. Sometimes, Chester, it will jar a man into rash action. Things start happening just a little too fast for him to comprehend. He doesn't think — he reacts. Bang, goes the weasel!"

"But, ahh, Mark. Are you saying you think we *should* stop progress?"

"You can't stop progress. That's meaningless," Redwing said. "But still, better to let the sleeping dogs lie, eh? Than to provoke their bark and their bite?" His voice was sardonic.

"Mark, I'm afraid I don't understand you at all," Chester Folkes said slowly. He shook his head as he spoke, and his fleshy cheeks shook.

Redwing wondered how long it would take Folkes to lose the flab, after the food stopped.

After luncheon, Redwing picked up an early edition of the afternoon *Post*, and admired the headline, "FINANCIER LEAPS." The photo, in the bottom left quarter of the page, was of Selma Ryan, displaying as much thigh as possible for the purpose of publicizing her latest TV show. The few short lines directly under the headline on the tabloid's front page said simply: "Abraham Victor, President of the New York Stock Exchange, jumped to his death . . . Market closed . . . immediate investigation under way . . . story on page three."

Page three carried the story across four columns of the top left, around the smiling photo of a gray old man. Redwing read only the opening lines: "Abraham Victor, president of the New York Stock Exchange for nine years, took his life today only shortly after opening business hours, at about 10:15 a.m., in a spectacular death dive from his 35th-story office in lower Manhattan. He left behind only a pile of well crumbled ashes to explain his action . . ."

"Strike one," said Redwing.



“Any calls?” Redwing asked, when he returned to the A & L office later that afternoon.

“Two. Both on the black phone—your other office. Dr. Seymore wants to see you about some charts. And somebody from the Ford Foundation, for a luncheon appointment. I put him down for next Wednesday.”

Redwing nodded, then tossed the paper onto his desk. “Seen this? Our first direct hit. Victor committed suicide. The Exchange is closed. They’re afraid of irregularities, but they’ll have to reopen. There’ll be a panic.”

The cream phone rang. Redwing answered it. He listened without speaking then hung up: “That was Cleveland,” he said. “Greyhound didn’t find the bomb in time.”

Linda turned to stare at him. “It—went off?”

Redwing nodded. “I trust the others will be searched far more diligently.”

Linda gave him a strange look as he went out again.

Mark Redwing did not return to the small office until late that afternoon, just as Linda was preparing to lock up. His expression was troubled.

“What’s up, Boss?” Linda asked solicitously. “Seymore’s pretty charts get out of order?”

Redwing sat down and stared out the single office window at the wall of the airshaft opposite. "No, not at all. I wish you wouldn't keep riding him. You've never met the man. He's an extremely able individual, exactly the man for the job, my perfect front man. Trouble is, he's *too* good."

"What do you mean? On the phone he's another one of these perfect Whiteys, all full of hearty hello's, how-are-you's, always telling me how we must meet some time, since we have the same boss. He strikes me as the sort who's better at getting a job than holding it. I get the feeling every time I talk to him that he's making a long-distance pass at me." She shrugged. "He should only know."

Redwing shook his head impatiently. "That's just the mold they cast scientists from these days. If he hadn't met me, Seymore would be bucking for a Government research grant or a niche in some huge corporation. Like everyone in his field, any intelligent man who wants to get anywhere, he's taken on the protective coloration. You should see him operate on those people from Ford.

"No, that's not the problem. Seymore is an okay man, all right. It's his job to set up the main computer program for us and to coordinate all the rest. He's already through the prelims — and it's the direction he finds himself headed toward that

is scaring him. He's smart. He can evaluate the stuff he's feeding into that program. And he's been getting closer and closer to the truth.

"As far as he knows, the Institute for Population Studies is simply trying to program a long-term study of political behavior, with an eye to a little forecasting in times to come. But nobody in the Institute is aware of my real reasons for setting it up, nor the uses I've been putting the program to. No one has any idea of my real purposes. They naively believe they're helping to turn political science into a *real* science, and they're full of what they think it'll do for human relations and all that baloney. God help us. If this sort of thing ever *was* used in politics . . .

"But, anyway, Seymore is catching on."

"How could he? You haven't been doing anything to make him suspicious, have you?" Linda asked.

Redwing swivled around to stare at her. She was not unappealing. "I don't have to. It's all there already. He's reading it out of the preliminary results and the data we've amassed. The headline on Victor crystallized it for him.

"The human brain, Linda, is a vastly superior and more efficient computer than anything we've yet built. Those chains of protein molecules store and remember everything. Every so often the subcon-

scious correlates a couple of items and comes up with a 'hunch,' which for the most part we ignore. Seymore — the man has a broad grasp of everything programmed for the computer. It's all up there in his own computerlike brain." Redwing tapped his own forehead. "It's just waiting for his subconscious to sort it all out.

"Now ideally he should arrive at the same conclusions. There's no magic to a computer, Linda. It just adds things up. Its only real advantage is its single-mindedness. It operates without bias, without the built-in 'noise' of distractions we humans have. It doesn't require a particular answer in order to justify its existence to itself. It has no prejudices. It just weighs all the factors, like a super adding machine, and reports the balance.

"There have been human computers — people with trick minds, the lightning calculators, the type who work huge sums without effort, or recall or compute the date of any day of the year, for any year in history. Most are idiots. Simple-minded. It's not a survival trait.

"But most of us have minds cluttered with too many problems, too many unrelated thoughts and ideas. Our emotions get in the way. And we don't trust our intuition. So there is Seymore; he's been picking and subconsciously sorting all the data he's been feeding the machine.

"There's only one answer. And it's nagging at him, at the fringes of his consciousness. Victor's death was very upsetting to him. He can't quite figure out why, but it is disturbing the man, Linda. And that disturbs me."

Linda nodded, slowly. "I see. But just how much can he find out?"

"The broad outlines: the trends and countertrends. They're all there in the data — I know; that's where I got them. The death of the individual among the masses. Population pressures. Racial friction. Religious friction. The growth of insuperable pressures, and monolithic power blocs. The signs are all there, just as I'd originally instituted them. The Institute's study necessarily confirms them.

"If you look for them, the trends are obvious: power massing, gaps growing. The world's getting too small. No man is more than two hours, by HST, from any other man in the world. You can't go off and live on an island any more. A bad cabbage crop in France will lay ten thousand men off Detroit assembly-lines. No one has to make decisions any more. Responsibility is a corporate function. How much longer can we wait for the Chinese and hope for prosperity to humanize them? One more major famine over there, and they'll take us all with them, just for spite. The races aren't assimilating any more — they're dividing. And where will

our allegiance go?" He laughed mirthlessly. "You've heard it all from me before. The world is one great machine now, and all of us are cogs within wheels within cogs within wheels. We're all geared in together, and we don't have a fly-wheel to balance us. We're a steam-roller without brakes.

"It's all there for Seymore to read. A huge machine on the verge of going completely out of control.

"And you know what we have to do, Linda. When a machine goes out of control, you have to stop it, before it blows up and destroys you.

"That's our job. To stop the machine." He nodded toward the Out basket. "Don't forget those letters when you go."

IV

Redwing worked late that night. He spent the next hour making phone calls and jotting notes. Several of his calls were overseas, by satellite.

Following that, he wrote letters, brief and anonymous, on Woolworth's typing bond. Occasionally, before sealing an envelope, he would tuck in a photostat or photograph. Once he opened the safe that was behind the file drawer marked "M" and removed several bills of a large denomination, which he dropped into an empty envelope with a blank sheet of paper. By the time he was

finished, the hour was late. He stood and stretched, then went out in the hall, locking his office behind him as though leaving it, and soaked his hands for five minutes in the washroom down the hall. His hands felt puffy and sore when he added more talc, snapped the gloves back on, and returned to the office, but he did not doff them for the night until his letters were in the mail and he was on his way home.

"You know," said Chester Folkes, after taking a rather strong gulp of his martini, "it is really not safe to be out on the streets, these days. Can you imagine it? There I was, taking an afternoon stroll from the apartment just trying to work up a little honest appetite, you know, and the next thing I knew, there were bullets flying all around me! This seedy little colored man, if you know what I mean, he was running down Sutton Place with a suitcase in one hand, and these policemen were shooting at him." He mopped his forehead with the napkin, oblivious to the reproving stare of the approaching waiter. "They got him, of course. Along with all the glass in the telephone booth on the corner across the street. They shot him and knocked him down in a heap right in the middle of the sidewalk, right in the direction in which I was heading. The suitcase fell

open and a little pile of dirty laundry spilled out of it. I heard one of the policeman swearing about it, and about how it would have to be covered up. I can't imagine what he was talking about. I was so upset that I hailed a cab. I would have crossed the street if a cab hadn't come along, you know that?" He downed the remainder of his martini and signaled for another. "Totally unnerving, to be shot at on *Sutton Place*."

"I can imagine," murmured Redwing.

There are some quite fascinating stories in here, if you know where to look for them," Redwing remarked to Linda a few days later. He tapped his copy of the morning *Times* with his forefinger.

"For instance, scandal has struck the Church. The Archbishop of the Eastern Diocese shot himself. A sin, you know. There was a riot in Seattle; somebody started potshooting the police during the Boeing strike, and they attacked the strikers. A shame; the strike had almost been resolved. And there's an editorial about that regiment of American Legion hotheads who invaded the East Village last night looking for pacifists to beat up. Another HST crashed into Long Island Sound almost immediately after takeoff from Kennedy, and yet another mistook the Indian Ocean for dry land. The FAA is considering

grounding them all. Douglas is screaming, of course."

"Was that all *us*?"

Redwing nodded, flashing his surprisingly canine teeth in a momentarily smile. "All but the American Legion."

"You've really got your program rolling, now," she said. Her tone was strange.

"Push a little here...pull a little there," Mark said. "Yes. Phase one is finished. We've flexed our muscles sufficiently to prove their capabilities. Now it's time for phase two — the main program."

"I just don't know," Linda said. "I mean, I can't see what good it's really doing, Mark. All I can see is that you've hurt a few individuals, ruined a few lives. And now you're aiming to destroy more people. But you keep saying that there is no individual responsibility any more. How can you expect this to add up to anything more than —"

"More than a little nastiness?" Redwing sighed. "That's where good old Population Studies comes in. I'm not hitting out at random, Linda. This is judo, an advanced sort of judo."

"I already *knew* things were heading out of control. You knew that. What I wanted, what I had to find, was a way to cripple them without just accelerating the big bang. I had to find a way to sabotage things, slow them down, with-

out completely destroying everything. Sure, Population Studies is a front, but it's a good front, because it's real. It's equally valid for what people think it's doing. But its real purpose, the real reason I set it up, is to weigh the masses of data, to show me the time and the place for another judo chop, another crippling blow. By hitting at the people I do, when I do, it's as though I knocked the tooth out of a gear — and made the machinery falter. It's not the specific men I hit, it's the things they symbolize, and what I strike *through* them. Like I said: chipping teeth from the gears. The gears aren't stripped, but — ”

“I see,” Linda said. Her tone was emotionless. “It's all a matter of gears and tactical chops to you. Just a matter of choosing the right targets at the right time?” There was something in the way she said it that kept Redwing from automatically agreeing with her.

“What's the matter, Linda? Developed a conscience all of a sudden?”

“**Y**ou're like a kid with an air-rifle,” she said, her voice tight, intense. “Like a kid who plinks at birds and squirrels like they were tin cans that moved. You don't see these people as real, live, human beings, do you?”

“Sometimes I think you're just a hostile Goddamned Indian still

sniping at the white settlers, you know that? And you feel free to hire me to assist your little scheme because you think, ‘She's a Negro. She'll go along with my ideas; she wants to see things changed too.’ But you're a rich man's son. It's like everything else for you — it's all just abstractions.”

He stared at her with concealed surprise. There was a hint of tears at the corners of her eyes. It was the first emotional outburst he'd seen from her.

“I forgot you took a Ph.D. in sociology, Linda,” he said calmly. “I forgot you knew all the answers already.”

There was a long silence. Then: “I've been talking with Seymore,” Linda said quietly. It was a bomb which fell, ticking, to the floor between them.

His face flickering no change of expression, Mark asked, “When was this?”

“Yesterday, when you were out. He called, he wanted to talk to you again. It was very urgent, he said. I asked him what he wanted. I told him I knew the main details of the program.

“He told me, Mark. He told me what was happening — what's really happening.”

“You didn't tell me he'd called.”

“No.”

There was another long silence. Suddenly the shrill yammer of the black phone broke the silence. Red-

wing fixed Linda with a sardonic look, then swiveled his back to her and picked up the phone.

"Ahh, Mark?" It was Chester Folks. "Ahh, listen, Mark, I'm afraid I'll have to skip lunch with you today." Mark said it was all right. "I hate to cancel out on you," Folkes said. His voice was thin and shrill over the phone. "I know how much you enjoy the chance to relax. But things have been a little hectic lately. Stocks are acting up, d'you know what I mean? My broker has been quite a bother for the last couple of days. I — well, I don't want to cry on your shoulder, old man. Perhaps tomorrow, eh?"

"Certainly, Chester," Redwing said. "Tomorrow." He hung the phone up, and swung back around to face Linda. "Where were we?"

"Seymore."

"Yes."

"Do you want to know what he said?"

Redwing did not answer.

"He told me he was running some independant checks of his own, that he'd had a hunch about things and he wanted to check it out. It was Victor's suicide. You were right about that, Mark. That's what set him off. It was too neat. It happened at too opportune a time. He wasn't sure for *whom* it was opportune, but... He worked it out. A week earlier, or a week later — it wouldn't have had the effect it had. It was just too pat for him.

So he started integrating a new factor: a party or parties dedicated to taking advantage of just such weak points as in the Victor case. And he extrapolated the trends."

"And just what did he find out, Linda?" Redwing asked softly.

"Chaos. Total chaos. Not just a little slowing down. The reverse. He said that things were snowballing, that it was like a finely tuned machine. If you threw it out of balance, the internal vibrations would tear it apart. You can't slow it down because that's how the balance is lost. He made some predictions, Mark. You want to know a couple?"

Redwing nodded, with a vague show of polite interest. His mind was elsewhere. Seymore was going to be a problem. One he'd have to deal with.

"He predicted that there'd be a breakdown in labor-management negotiations throughout most of the major industries. He said any spark, almost, could set it off. He said that there might be an aviation crisis. He suspected that there might be a popular uprising against organized religion."

"That's not all," Redwing said. "Tonight on Public Television, in the midst of the Disney Retrospective, a fifteen-minute piece of animated pornography will be shown in living color. Snow White never looked so good."

Linda glared at him, wordlessly.

"But you're right, at that," Redwing said. "Let's not quibble over terms. We have only one foreseeable future: chaos. We have two possible ways to get there: slow disintegration, or the big bang. If Seymore weren't an idiot, he'd have tried an extrapolation along both lines instead of just the one. I want chaos, yes. But I want the chaos that man can survive. Yes, I *do* want to reduce our gleaming technology to rubble. I want to bring the whole stinking mess down around our ears, Linda, because as hard as it'll hurt, it's better than extinction for the race."

Redwing rose from his desk and began to pace. "Ever since we've had atomic power, we've been in acute danger. And since the positron bomb has been a reality we've been living on borrowed time.

"There are two schools of thought. One holds that power is so dangerous that it must not be held by individuals, but by groups — corporations. The other feels that power must be held by a small and closely watched number of individuals.

"But they are both wrong. As long as power exists in such a tremendous concentration, it doesn't matter *who* holds it. In any hands, it's too dangerous. We must disarm the bomb. We must strip out the fuse and scatter the components to the winds.

"In other words, Linda, we must create chaos. My ancestors had the right idea. When mankind is reduced to small and semi-isolated communities at best — or subsistence-level existence at worst — when the lines of communications and transportation are completely broken so that there can be no warring nations poised at the brink of disaster, *then* the human race can take a deep breath and begin to live again.

"We've been pushed too far, too fast. We're breeding out of control. We're a half-mad cage of overcrowded rats. We're losing our souls in the hell of our own making.

"It has to end, Linda. It *will* end. Of that there can be no doubting. The only question is *how*. Can we control it sufficiently? Or will it wipe us all out?

"Sure, millions — billions, even — will die. They'll be the ones who can't adjust, the city-dwellers cut off from food and water and —" he laughed once, a short bark — "their clubs. They're the excess. They have to go. Something would take them in any case: plague, war, pollution. But they can't call their present lives really *living*, anyway, caught as they are in sterile boxes, pressured from birth to death in anonymity.

"I don't kid myself I'm really doing them a favor, the ones who won't make it. But I'll be doing the race one."

“You poor naive, idiotic fool,”

Linda said quietly and bitterly. “You, you—*idealist*. Back to nature. Back to your father’s father’s ways. Solve everything by turning the clock back. Do you think that destroying this country alone would accomplish anything — beyond doing the Sino-Soviet Bloc’s work for them? Do you really think you’d be doing a favor for *anyone*?”

Mark sighed, turned to stare out the small dingy window. Sunlight slanted down the airshaft, warming and yellowing the sooty brick wall opposite. “You can’t conquer a country when it isn’t a country any more,” he said. “Not when it’s nothing but an area of tribes and individuals, and all the channels for control are gone. But that’s an academic point in any case. I’m not quite so much alone in this as you may have thought, Linda. And in any case, they’re too closely joined to us, economically, to escape the scythe. You’re right — it’s a snowball. It won’t observe the artificial distinction of national borders. I’m sorry you’ve chosen to react in this way, Linda. Because this is my mission. I will not be stopped.”

Behind him, Linda reached a shaking hand into her purse and removed a small gun. It was a .25

calibre solid-fuel, self-propelling-slug Schneikel automatic. It was as thin as a cigarette case; it was designed for a woman’s purse.

“I was afraid of that.” Her voice caught and something about it alerted Redwing. He started to turn.

“The trial period’s over, you said. And Seymore says soon we’ll be over the brink, past the point of no return. Somebody has to stop you,” Linda said. “I wish it didn’t have to be me. Good-bye, Mark.”

The violent hissing of the small gun blended with her last words. It was much easier than she’d thought it would be. The gun lay easily in her hand, and when she squeezed the trigger it did not recoil.

The first shot was high, and she thought she’d missed, as Redwing threw himself at her. The second and third shots caught him in his throat and chest. It was much messier than she’d expected.

The cream phone began to ring.

Redwing’s leg kicked weakly at the desk, then lay still.

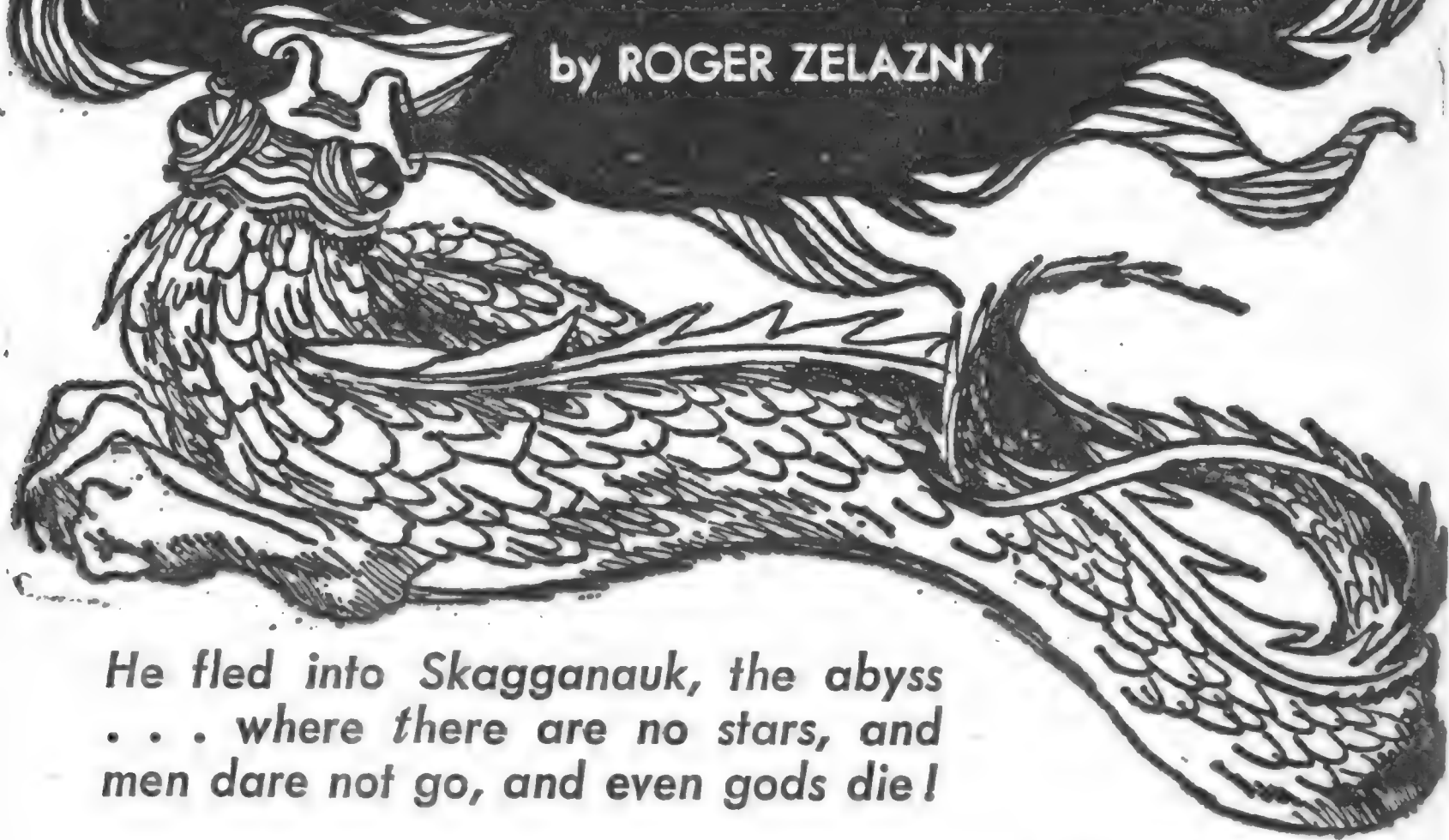
With subdued haste, the saboteur gathered up her few things from the office and left.

The phone continued to ring for a long time. **END**

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CREATURES OF DARKNESS

by ROGER ZELAZNY



*He fled into Skagganauk, the abyss
... where there are no stars, and
men dare not go, and even gods die!*

Illustrated by REIBER

I

“Father?” says the dark horse
shadow upon the castle wall.

“Yes, Typhon.”

“Father!”

A sound to break the ears occurs
then.

“Anubis said you had perished!”

“He lied. Osiris must have wielded the Hammer, saying that he was saving the universe, for I was losing the battle.”

“That is true,” says the Prince.

“I was not losing, however. I

was winning. He wished to slay me, not the Nameless."

"How did you survive?"

"A reflex. I went into fugue as the blow descended. A fraction of it fell upon me, and Anubis retrieved me, senseless, and spirited me off to his House. He scattered my gear across the Midworlds. He trained me as his weapon."

"To slay Thoth?"

"That was the task he gave me."

"Then he dies!" said Typhon and rears, flaming.

"Desist, brother," says the Prince. "He did not succeed, and we may yet have a use for the dog." But already the dark horse shadow has faded, and the Prince lowers his head.

He looks to Set.

"Should we follow to stop him?"

"Why? Anubis has lived a thousand years too long. Let him guard himself now. — And how? Even if we would, there is none can stop Typhon when the madness lies upon him."

"That is true," says the Prince and turning, he addresses Vramin:

"If you would serve me further, my former Angel of the Seventh Station, go you to the House of the Dead. It will soon require the presence of one who can operate the machinery."

"Typhon was Lord of the House of Fire," says Vramin.

"Yes, but I fear he will not remain in the House of the Dead af-

ter he has gained vengeance. If I know my brother, he will then seek out the one who wielded the Hammer. He will go after Osiris."

"Then I shall remove me to the House of the Dead. Will you accompany me, Madrak?"

"If the Prince has no further use for me here."

"I have not. You may go."

"Lord," says Vramin, "it is kind of you to trust me again, knowing the part I played in the Wars of the Stations."

"Those days are gone, and we are different people. Are we not?"

"I hope so — and thank you."

The Prince crosses his arms and bows his head. Vramin and Madrak vanish.

"How," says the Steel General, "may I assist you?"

"We go again to fight the Nameless," says the Prince Who Was A Thousand. "Will you come and stand in reserve?"

"Yes. Let me summon Bronze."

"Do so."

The winds of Marachek stir the dust. The sun flickers its way into another day.

Vramin stands in the great Hall of the House of the Dead, holding his Maypole cane. Its streamers go forth, entering into all the passageways, visible or otherwise, which come together at that place.

At his side, Madrak shifts his

weight from foot to foot and stares about him.

Vramin's eyes glow, and the light dances within them.

"Nothing. Nothing alive. Nowhere," he says.

"Then Typhon has found him," says Madrak.

"Typhon is not here either."

"Then he has slain him and departed. He doubtless seeks Osiris now."

"I wonder. . . ."

"What else could it be?"

"I do not know. But now I am master here, by delegation of the Prince. I will find the places of power and learn their functions."

"Yet once you broke faith with the Prince."

"That is true — and he forgave me."

Then Vramin seats himself upon the throne of Anubis, and Madrak pays him homage, saying:

"Hail, Vramin! Master of the House of the Dead"

"You need bend no knee to me, old friend. Please rise. I will need your assistance, for this place is quite different from Seventh Station, where once I reigned."

And for hours Vramin studies the secret controls about the throne. Then, "Anubis!" cries a voice which he knows is not the voice of Madrak.

And somehow he mimics the bark, the whine:

"Yes?"

"You were right. Horus was defeated, and he returned here. But he is gone again."

It is the voice of Osiris.

He gestures with his cane, and the big window appears in the middle of the air.

"Hello, Osiris," he says.

"So the Prince has finally moved," says Osiris. "I suppose I am next"

"I hope not," says Vramin. "I can personally attest to having heard the Prince assure Horus that he would not take vengeance upon you — in exchange for cooperation."

"Then what has become of Anubis?"

"I do not know for certain. Typhon came here to kill him. I came here to clean up after Typhon and to hold the Station. Either he has slain him and departed, or Anubis fled and Typhon followed. So listen to me, Osiris. Despite the Prince's assurance, you are in danger. Typhon is not aware of the Prince's promise, and he was not party to it. Having learned the true story from Set herself and having heard it confirmed by the Prince, he is likely to seek vengeance on the wielder of the Hammer — "

"Set lives?"

"Yes, He was known for a time as Wakim."

"Anubis's emissary!"

"None other. The dog had stripped him of his memories and sent him to slay his own son — and fa-

ther. That is what moved Typhon to anger."

"A pox on the whole bloody family! And what has become of my son? He but left me this note, and — Of course!"

"'Of course,' what?"

"It is not too late. I — "

"Behind you, on the wall!" cries Vramin. "Typhon!"

Osiris moves with a speed which belies his fragile appearance. He dives toward a green tapestry, casts it aside and moves beyond.

The shadow flows after him and rears.

When it moves away, there is a Typhon-shaped hole in the tapestry and the wall itself.

"Typhon," says Vramin.

"I am here," comes the voice. "Why did you give warning?"

"Because Thoth gave him his life."

"I was not aware of this."

"You did not remain long enough to hear it repeated. Now it is too late."

"No. I fear he has escaped me."

"How so?"

"He was not within the chamber when I destroyed it."

"This may be a good thing. Listen. We can use Osiris."

"No! There can never be peace between our families so long as he lives, regardless of any chivalrous sentiments my brother may mouth. No. I will search this House until

I find Osiris and he passes down Skagganauk Abyss!"

"As did Anubis?"

"No! Anubis has escaped me!" comes the cry. "For a time."

Then Typhon rears; the flames come, and he is gone.

Vramin makes a daisy-beheading gesture with his cane and the window is closed.

"Anubis still lives," says Madrak, looking back over his shoulder.

"Obviously."

"What shall we do?"

"We shall continue to study the functions of the House of the Dead."

"I wish to rest."

"Then do so. Find yourself a near chamber and retire. You know where the food is."

"Yes."

"Till later, then."

"Till later, Lord."

Madrak goes forth from the great Hall and he wanders. He comes after a time to a chamber where the dead stand like statues. He seats himself among them. He speaks.

"I was his faithful servant. Hear me, lady with the breasts like melons. I was his faithful servant. The poet went to war with the other Angels, knowing it went against his will. But he is forgiven and exalted. And where am I? Servant to a servant."

It is not fair.

"I'm glad you agree with me. And you there, fellow with the

extra arms. Did you spread religion and morality? Did you single-handedly defeat monsters and wondrous beasts among the unenlightened?"

Of course not.

"So you see." He slaps his thigh. "So you see, there is no justice, and virtue is constantly betrayed, befouled, imposed upon. Look what has become of the General, who devoted his life to humanity; Life took away his own humanity. Is *that* justice?"

Hardly.

"All comes to this, my brothers. We all become statues in the House of the Dead, regardless of the lives we led. The universe never thanks. The giver is never repaid. Oh, You Who May Be, why did You make things to be this way — if You did make things, to be this way, that is. Why? I have tried to serve You and the Prince, Your Agent. What's it gotten me? Coach fare and third-class accommodations. I am glad that Set battles the Nameless without the gauntlet of power — "

"What?"

And looking up, he sees a statue which had not been there before; and unlike the others, it moves.

Its head is the head of a black dog, and its red tongue darts and curls.

“You! How could you have hidden from Vramin, escaped Typhon?"

"This is my House. It will be many ages before all its secrets may be learned by another."

Madrak stands, and his staff spins in his hands.

"I do not fear you, Anubis. I have fought it every clime and place where man may take the Word. I have sent many to this House, and I come myself as a conqueror, not a victim."

"You were conquered long ago, Madrak, and you only just now realized it."

"Silence, dog! You speak to one who holds your life in his hands."

"And you speak to one who holds your future in his."

"What do you mean?"

"You said that Set goes to battle the Nameless once again?"

"That is true. And when the Nameless has been destroyed, the millennium will come."

"Ha! Save your metaphysics, preacher. Answer me another thing, and I will tell you a very good thing indeed."

"What thing?"

Anubis steps forward, limp arm fluttering at his side.

"What of the gauntlet of power?"

"Oh," says Madrak, removing a gauntlet from beneath his dark garment and drawing it upon his right hand. "When I obtained this item, I thought that worlds might be won for the faith with it." It reaches to his elbow, his shoulder. "I did not know that Wakim was

Set. I was tempted to keep it for myself. So I substituted my own gauntlet-that-grows. It is a common enough item in some places among the Midworlds. This one seems to be of peculiar potency, while the other is but ordinary armor." The gauntlet now flares to cover his back and his chest.

"I could kiss thy fat cheeks," says Anubis. "For Set will now have less of a chance against the Nameless. And all along you planned this betrayal! You are a shrewder man than I'd supposed, Dad!"

"I was used and I was tempted."

"But no more shalt thou be used. Oh no! Now you wear the glove, and I propose an alliance — "

"Back, dog! You're no better than anyone else. I've something you want now and my backside is suddenly kissing sweet. Oh no! Whatever I do with my newfound power, I do for one person: Me!"

"The alliance I propose will be mutually beneficial."

"I need but give the alarm and you will be bound so tightly that all your guile will not serve to free you. I need but spin my staff in the proper manner and your brain will decorate the walls. So speak now with that in mind, fork-tongue, and I will listen."

"If Osiris still lives," says Anubis, "and if we can reach him, then we three together may be able to destroy Thoth."

"I am sure that Osiris still lives — though for how much longer this will be so, I cannot say. Typhon pursues him about the House of Life at this moment."

"We've a chance, a very good chance, of recovering all — now that you hold the gauntlet. I've got a way to get us to the House of Life, and perhaps a way to rescue Osiris, also."

"Then what? We do not even know where the battle with the Nameless is occurring."

"One thing by itself, another when it arises. Are you with me?"

"I'll go along with you to the House of Life, as Thoth desires that Osiris live and I may help to effect this much of his will. In the meantime, I shall be thinking."

"That is good enough."

"See how the gauntlet grows. Further than before! It is down to my thighs this time!"

"Excellent! The more invincible you become, the better for us all."

"A moment. Do you seriously think the three of us can defeat Thoth, Set and the Steel General?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"The Hammer may strike again," says Anubis.

"It still exists?"

"Yes, and Osiris is its master."

"Well, granting all these things and assuming that even Vramin, who is now master in your House,

may be dealt with — what of the other? What of the great shadow in the shape of a horse which will pursue us till the end of our days, he who does not live in space as we know it, who cannot be destroyed, and who cannot be reasoned with when anger lies upon him?"

Anubis looks away.

"Typhon do I fear," he admits. "Ages ago I constructed a weapon — no, not a weapon, a thing — which I thought might serve to restrain him. When I tried to use it recently, he fell upon it and destroyed it. He also took my arm. I admit that I have nothing but my wit to use against him. But one does not throw away an empire for fear of one individual. If only I knew the secret of his power. . . ."

"I heard him mention Skagganauk Abyss."

"There is no such place."

"I've never heard the name before. You have?"

"Legend, fancy, fiction."

"And what do these things tell of it?"

"We waste time discussing nonsense."

"If you wish my assistance, you will answer me. See, the gauntlet now reaches to my knees

"Skagganauk Abyss, sometimes called the chasm in the sky," says Anubis, "is the place where it is said that all things stop and nothing exists."

"There are many very empty

spaces throughout the universe."

"But the Abyss is said to be empty of space, also. It is a bottomless hole that is not a hole. It is a gap in the fabric of space itself. It is nothing. It is the theoretical hub of the universe. It is the big exit leading nowhere, under, over, beyond, out of it all. That's Skagganauk Abyss."

"Typhon does seem to possess these qualities himself, does he not?"

"Yes, he does. I'll admit that. But it answers nothing. Curse the mating of Set and Isis! They have begotten a brute and a monster!"

"You can hardly talk, Anubis. Was Typhon always as he is now? How could the Witch be delivered of such a one?"

"I do not know. He is older than I. That whole family is shrouded in mystery and paradox. Let us be off to the House of Life!"

Madrak nods his head.

"Show me the way, Anubis."

II

Horus walks in the places of power, and none know his name. But if each among the creatures which pass were to be asked, they would say that they had heard something of him. For he is a god. His power is almost beyond measure. He has been defeated, however. The Prince Who Was A Thousand, his brother, worked his

undoing to preserve his own life and the order of life which he represents.

Now, Horus turns up an avenue, well lighted, where the various species cavort. Power and the night are around him.

He has come to this particular street on this particular world for a reason: He is invariably undecided. He needs opinions. He loves oracles.

He seeks advice.

Darkness in the sky, bright lights along the thoroughfare. He passes places and people of entertainment.

A man moves to bar his way. He seeks to pass around him, stepping into the street. The man follows and seizes his arm.

Horus glows his breath upon him and it comes down with the force of a hurricane. The man is swept away and Horus moves on .

After a time, he comes to a place of oracles. The Tarot readers and the astrologers and the numerologists and the casters of the Yi Ching beckon to the god in the red loin cloth. But he passes them by.

Finally, he comes to a place where there are no people.

It is the place of the machines which predict.

At random, he selects a booth, enters.

"Yes?" inquires the booth.

"Queries," Horus replies.

"A moment."

There comes a metallic click, and an inner door opens.

"Enter the cubicle."

Horus moves to enter a small room.

It contains a bed, of sorts. A heavy female torso lies upon it, joined with a gleaming console. A speaker is set within the wall.

"Mount the inquiry unit," he is instructed.

Discarding his loincloth, Horus does this thing.

The rule is that your questions will be answered for so long as you give satisfaction," he is informed.

"What is it that you wish to know?"

"I have a problem: I find myself in conflict with my brother. I tried to defeat him. I failed. I cannot make up my mind as to whether I should seek him out again and renew the battle."

"Insufficient information to reply," comes the answer. "What sort of conflict? What sort of brother? What sort of man are you?"

Gruesome grow the lilacs and the rose rows be hedges of thorn. The garden of memory is filled with frantic bouquets.

"Perhaps I have come to the wrong place."

"This may be, and it may not. Obviously though, you do not know the rules."

"Rules?" and Horus stares up at the dull mesh of the speaker.

Dry monotone, the voice is sifted through:

"I am not a seer, nor am I a fore-seer. I am an electrical-mechanical-biological votary of the god Logic. Pleasure is my price, and for it I will invoke the god for any man. To do so, however, I need a more complete question. I do not possess sufficient data to answer you at this point. So love me, tell me more."

"I do not know where to begin," Horus begins. "My brother once ruled all things — "

"Stop! Your statement is illogical, unquantifiable — "

" . . . And quite correct. My brother is Thoth, sometimes called the Prince Who Was A Thousand. One time, all of the Midworlds were his kingdom."

"My records indicate the existence of a myth concerning a Lord of Life and Death. According to the myth, he had no brothers."

Correction. These matters are generally kept within the family. Isis had three sons, one of them by her lawful Lord, Osiris; two of them by Set the Destroyer. Unto Set she begat Typhon and Thoth. Unto Osiris she begat Horus the Avenger, myself."

"Thou art Horus?"

"You have named me."

"You wish to destroy Thoth?"

"That was my assigned task."

"You cannot do it."

"Oh."

"Please do not depart. There may be more questions you wish to ask."

"I can't think of any."

But Horus cannot depart at this moment, for the fires are upon him.

"What are you?" he finally inquires.

"I have already told you."

"Yet how have you become what you are: half-woman, half machine?"

"This is the one question I may not answer, unless I am properly cued. I shall, however, attempt to comfort thee, seeing that thou art distraught."

"Thank you. You are kind."

"It is my pleasure."

"I'd say that once you were human."

"That is correct."

"Why did you cease being so?"

"I may not say, as I have already said."

"May I help you in any way to effect anything which you may desire?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"I may not say."

"Do you know for a fact that Horus may not destroy Thoth?"

"This is the most valid probability, based on the knowledge of the myths which I possess."

"If you were a mortal woman, I'd be inclined to be kind to you."

"What does that mean?"

"I might love you for your terrible honesty.

"My god, my god! Thou hast saved me."

"What do you mean?"

"I have been doomed to this existence till one who is greater than men shall look upon me with love."

"I might look upon you in such a manner. Would you deem that probable?"

"No, for I am too used."

"Then you know not the god Horus."

"It is the utmost improbability."

"But I've no one else to love. So I love you."

"The god Horus loves me?"

"Yes."

"Then thou art my Prince, and thou hast come!"

"I do not —"

"Bide thou a moment and other things shall occur."

"I shall abide," says Horus.

III

Vramin walks through the House of the Dead. Had you eyes in that place, you couldn't see a thing. It is far too dark for eyes to be of value. But Vramin can see.

He walks through an enormous room, and when he reaches a certain point within it there comes a light that is dim and orange and crowded into corners.

Then they come up out of the transparent rectangles which now

appear in the floor, come up unbreathing, unblinking and horizontal, and they rest upon invisible catafalques at a height of two feet, and their garments and skins are of all colors and their bodies of all ages. Now some have wings and some have tails, and some have horns and some long talons. Some have all of these things, and some have pieces of machinery built into them and some do not.

There comes a moaning and a creaking of brittle bones, then movement.

Rustling, clicking, chafing, they sit up, they stand up.

Then all bow down before him, and one word fills the air:

"*Master.*"

He turns his green eyes upon the multitude, and from somewhere a sound of laughter comes to fall upon his ears.

Turning, turning, turning, he waves his cane.

Then there is a sudden movement, and she stands by his side.

"Vramin, your new subjects pay you homage."

"Lady, how did you get in here?"

But she laughs again and does not answer his question.

"I, too, have come to honor thee: Hail Vramin! Lord of the House of the Dead!"

"You are kind, Lady."

"I am more than kind. The end draws near, and that which I desire is almost at hand."

"It was you who raised these dead to rest once more, and I may ask your assistance. I may also ask what it is that you desire."

"And I may tell you."

The dead suddenly lie down and descend into their graves. The light departs.

"Do you know why Anubis fled?" he inquires.

"No, I am only just arrived here."

"He departed, pursued by your son Typhon."

And the Red Witch smiles within her veils.

"That Typhon lives pleases me beyond measure," she says. "Where is he now?"

"Presently, he is seeking the life of Osiris. It may be that he has already disposed of both the dog and the bird."

And she laughs, and her familiar leaps upon her shoulder and holds its stomach with both hands.

"How joyous a thing this would be — now! We must look upon this affair!."

"Very good," and Vramin draws a green picture frame upon the dark air.

Isis moves to his side and takes his hand in hers.

Suddenly there is a picture within the frame, and it moves.

It is the picture of a dark horse shadow, alone, moving upon a wall.

"This is of no help to us," says Vramin.

"No, but it is good to look upon my son once again, my son who contains the Abyss of Skagganauk within him. Where may his brother be?"

With his father, as they have gone to fight the Nameless once again."

And Isis drops her eyes, and the picture wavers.

"I would look upon this thing," she finally says.

"Before this, I would locate Anubis and Osiris, if they still live — and Madrak."

"Very well."

And within its emerald frame, the picture slowly takes form.

His arm is around her waist, and together they watch the pictures that form within the frame, there in the House of the Dead. They watch Osiris, as he sails across the sky in his black crossbow, upon which is mounted a thing that can smash a sun. He rides alone, and the yellow eyes never blink within that face which cannot know expression. They watch the dark cockleshell which contains Anubis, Madrak and an empty glove which holds power.

Vramin traces two lines with the courses of the vessels. The picture changes to the place where the lines intersect. There lies the twilight world, and its surface un-

der goes upheavals as they watch.

"How it is that they could know the place?" asks Isis.

"I do not know — Unless — Osiris! He found a note. I watched his expression as he read it."

"And . . . ?"

"Horus. Horus must have left him the note — telling him the place. "

"How could Horus know it?"

"He fought with Thoth — probably within Thoth's own mind, and Horus can look into a man's head, know what he is thinking. Sometime during that encounter, he must have stolen this knowledge from the Prince, who is normally proof against such skills. Yes, at some time he must have let down his guard for an instant. He must be warned!"

"Perhaps Typhon will yet provide for his safety."

"Where is Typhon now?"

They regard the frame and all pictures flee.

Black, black, black. There is nothing.

"It is as though Typhon does not exist," says Vramin.

"No," says Isis. "You look upon Skagganauk the Abyss. Typhon has withdrawn from the universe, to seek his own way along the undersides of space as men know it. It may be that he, too, has found whatever note Horus left."

"This is not sufficient insurance for the Prince. The whole project

may miscarry unless we can reach him."

"Then go to him quickly!"

"I cannot."

"One of your famous gateways."

"They only function within the Midworlds. I draw my power from the tides. I cannot operate beyond. Lady, how did you come here?"

"In my chariot."

"Of the Ten Invisible Powers?"

"Yes."

"Then let us use it."

"I fear — Listen, Mage. You must understand. I am a woman and I love my son, but I also love my life. I am afraid. I fear the place of that conflict. Do not think the less of me if I refuse to accompany you. You may take my chariot and you may ride in it, but you must keep your own company."

"I think not the less of you, Lady."

"Then take this pendant. It controls the Ten Powers that drive the chariot, and it will give you additional strengths."

"Will it function beyond the Midworlds?"

"Yes," and she slides into his arms and for a moment his green beard tickles her neck while her familiar gnashes its tiny teeth and knots its tail, twice.

[Then she conducts him to her chariot on the roof of the House of the Dead, and he mounts it, holds high the pendant in his right hand, becomes for a moment part of a

cleverly contrived tableau within a red-glass bottle, is then a distant twinkle in the heavens Isis watches.

Shuddering, she retreats to the places of the dead, to dwell again upon the one whom she fears to face, who is even now battling the Nameless.

Vramin stares ahead with eyes of jade. Points of yellow light dance within them.

Behind Vramin's eyes is the vision distilled.

There stands the Prince, downward staring. The surface of the world's afire. On the hood of the Prince's ship stands the beast whose body is armor, whose rider sits unmoving, gleaming, also facing the place of conflict. The crossbow approaches. The cockleshell swings forward. The Hammer is cocked, snaps forward. Then rag-tail ablaze, the comet comes forth, glowing, brightening as it races onward.

Somewhere, a banjo is plucked as Bronze rears and the head of the General swivels over his left shoulder to face the intruder. His left hand jerks toward him and Bronze continues to rear, up onto his hindmost legs and then springs away from the Prince's vessel. Three strides only are taken. Mount and rider vanish. There comes a haziness, a crinkling, and the stars dance in that corner of the sky, as though they are reflections within an agitated pool. The comet is

caught up in this wind that is Change, becomes two-dimensional, is gone. Pieces of the broken crossbow continue on along the path the vessel had followed when whole. The cockleshell heads toward the surface of the world, vanishes amid the smoke and the dust, the flames. For a long while, the entire tableau is a still-life. Then the cockleshell streaks away. It now contains three occupants.

Vramin tightens his hand upon the piece of bloody light, and the Chariot of Ten turns to pursue.

The conflict rages upon the surface of the planet. The globe seems a liquid and boiling thing, changing shape, spurting forth fiery fountains. There comes a series of enormous blazes and a mighty shattering. The world comes apart. There is brightness, mighty, mighty, and dust, confusion: fragmentation.

Behind the jade eyes of Vramin, within which dances the yellow lights, there is this vision.

IV

Hands clasped behind his back, the Prince Who Was a Thousand considers the destruction of the world.

The broken body of the world, its members splintered and crushed, rotates beneath him, flattening, elongating, burning, burning, burning.

Now he watches through an in-

strument as he orbits about the ruin, an instrument like a pink lorgnette with antennae. Occasionally, there is a click and the antennae twitch. He lowers it, raises it again, several times. Finally, he puts it aside.

"What is it that you see, my brother?"

He turns his head, and the dark horse shadow is at his side.

"I see a living point of light, caught up in that mass down there," he says. "Twisted, shrunken, weakly pulsing, but still alive. Still living."

"Then our father has failed."

"I fear so."

"This thing must not be."

And Typhon is gone.

Now, as Vramin pursues the cockle of Anubis, he sees the thing for which there is no understanding.

Upon the blasted heap of elements that was a world there comes now a dark spot. It grows, amidst the light, the dust, the confusion, grows until its outline becomes discernable:

It is a dark horse shadow that has fallen upon the rubble.

It continues to grow until it achieves the size of a continent.

Rearing, the dark horse is rampant over all. It swells, it expands, it lengthens, until the wreckage of the entire planet is contained within it.

Then it is framed in flame. Nothing lies within the blazing silhouette. Nothing whatsoever.

Then the flames subside and the shadow shrinks, retreating, retreating, running down a long, absolutely empty corridor.

Then there is nothing.

It is as if the world had never existed. It is gone, finished, kaput, and the Nameless Thing That Cries in the Night along with it. And now, Typhon, too, is gone.

A line comes into Vramin's head: "Die Luft ist kuhl und es dunkelt, und ruhig fliest den Rhein." He remembers not the source, but knows the feeling.

Bloodbolt held on high, he pursues the god of death.

V

Awakening, slowly, manacled spread-eagle fashion to a steel table, bright lights stabbing down through his yellow eyes like electric needles within his brain, Set groans softly and tests the strength of his bonds.

His armor is gone, that pale glow in the corner might be the star wand, his shoes that walk upon everything are not to be seen.

"Hello, Destroyer," says the wearer of the glove. "You are fortunate to have survived the encounter."

"Madrak?" he asks.

"Yes."



"I can't see you. Those lights—"

"I'm standing behind you, and those lights are only for purposes of preventing your use of temporal fugue to depart this vessel before we are ready to permit it."

"I do not understand."

"The battle waxeth furious below. I am watching it through a port now. It looks as if you have the upper hand. In a moment, the Hammer that Smashes Suns will strike again, and you will of course escape it as you did the last time — by means of the fugue. That is why we were able to pick you up a few moments ago, just as Anubis did in days long gone by. The fact that you did appear testifies to what will happen shortly. There! Osiris strikes, and the Hammer begins its descent — Anubis! Something is wrong! There is some sort of change occurring! The Hammer is . . . is . . . gone. . . ."

"Yes, I see it now," comes the familiar bark. "And Osiris, too, has gone away. The Steel General, he it was."

"What shall we do now?"

"Nothing. Nothing whatsoever. This turn is even better than we had hoped. Set's occurrence recently by means of the fugue testifies that some cataclysmic event will still shortly occur. Does it not, Set?"

"Yes."

"Your final clash will doubtless destroy the world."

"Probably. I didn't stay."

"Yes, there it goes," says Madrak.

"Wonderful! Now we have Set; Osiris has been disposed of, and the Steel General is no longer available to pursue us. We have Thoth precisely where we want him. Hail Madrak, new Lord of the House of Life!"

"Thank you, Anubis. I didn't think it could be that easily accomplished — but what of the Nameless?"

"Surely it must have fallen this time. What of it, Set?"

"I don't know. I struck it with the full force of the wand."

"Then everything is tied up neatly. Now hear me, Set. We wish you no ill, nor will we harm your son Thoth. We rescued you when we could have left you to rot —"

"Then why have you secured me thus?"

"Because I know your temper and your power, and I wished to reason with you before freeing you. You might not have granted me sufficient opportunity, so I insured it myself. I wish to deal with Thoth through you —"

"Lord!" cries Madrak. "Observe the ruined world! There comes over it a monstrous shadow!"

"It is Typhon!"

"Yes. What can he be doing?"

"What do you know of this, Set?"

"It means that I failed, and that somewhere amid the ruins a Name-

less Thing still cries in the night. Typhon is completing the job."

"There is fire, master, and — I cannot look upon the emptiness which occurs!"

"Skagganauk Abyss!"

"**Y**es," says Set. "Typhon is Skagganauk Abyss. He evicts the Nameless from the universe."

"What was the Nameless?"

"A god," says Set, "an old god, I'm sure, with nothing left to be divine about any more."

"I do not understand," says Madrak.

"He jests. But what of Typhon? How shall we deal with him?"

"You may not have to," says Set. "What he has done has probably resulted in his own exile from the universe."

"Then we have won, Anubis! We have won! Typhon was the only thing you feared, was he not?"

"Yes. Now the Midworlds lie for ever within my hands."

"And mine, don't forget!"

"Of course not. So tell me, Set. You see the ways the stars are drifting. Will you join with us? You will become the right hand of Anubis. Your son can be a Regent. He may name his own job, for I do not undervalue his wisdom. What say you?"

"I must think of this thing."

"To be sure. Take your time. Realize, however, that I am now invincible."

"And you realize that I have defeated God in battle."

"It could not have been God," says Madrak, "or He would not have been defeated!"

"No," says Set. "You saw Him at the end. You witnessed His power. And even now He is not dead, only in exile."

Madrak lowers his head, covers his face with his hands.

"I do not believe you! I cannot."

"But it is true, and you have been party to this thing, oh recreant priest, blasphemer, apostate!"

"Silence, Set!" cries Anubis. "Don't listen to him, Madrak. He sees your weakness, as he sees the weaknesses of all things he encounters. He seeks to draw you on to a battlefield of another sort, one where you struggle against yourself, to be beaten by the guilt he has contrived for you. Ignore him!"

"But what if he speaks the truth? I stood by and did nothing — even profited by — "

"Indeed you did," says Set. "The guilt is mainly mine, but I bear it with pride. You were party to the action, however. You stood by and watched, thinking of the profit that would come to you, while He whom you served was beaten to His knees — "

Anubis strikes him a terrible blow that rips the flesh of his cheek.

"I take it that you have made up

your mind, and this is your answer: To try to turn Madrak against me. It will not work. He is not so gullible as you think — are you, Dad?"

Madrak does not answer, but continues to stare out the port. Set struggles against his bonds but cannot loosen them.

"Anubis! We are pursued!"

Anubis departs Set's side, vanishing into darkness. The lights continue to stab downward.

"It is the Chariot of Ten," Anubis says.

"Of the Lady Isis?" Madrak inquires. "Why should she follow us?"

"Because Set was once her beloved. Perhaps he still is. Eh, Set? What's the story?"

But Set does not reply.

"Whatever," says Madrak, "it draws nears. How strong is the Red Witch? Will she give us trouble?"

"She was not so strong but that she feared her old Lord, Osiris, avoiding him for many centuries — and I am certainly as strong as Osiris. We will not be beaten by a woman. Not when we have come this far."

Madrak bows his head, mumbling, and begins to beat upon his breast.

"Stop that! You're being ridiculous!"

But Set laughs, and Anubis turns

upon him with a savage snarl.

"I'll tear your heart out for that!"

But Set raises his bleeding left hand which he has just torn free and holds it before his body.

"Try it, dog! Your one hand against mine. Your staff and any other weapon you have against the left hand of Set. Come closer!" And his eyes glow like twin suns and Anubis falls back beyond his grasp.

The lights continue to dazzle and spin.

"Kill him Madrak!" cries Anubis. "He is of no further use to us! You wear the gauntlet of power! He cannot stand against it!"

But Madrak does not reply, instead, "Forgive me, Whatever You Are or Were, Wherever You May or May Not Be, for omissions and commissions in which I indulged or did not indulge, as the case may be, in this matter which has just come to pass," he says, still beating his breast. "And in the event that — "

"Then give me the glove!" cries Anubis. "Quickly!"

But Madrak continues.

A shudder runs through the cockleshell, and magicians and poets being very good at that sort of thing, a doorway which had been doubly sealed springs open, and Yramin enters.

He waves his cane and smiles.

"How do? How do?"

"Take him, Madrak!" cries Anubis.

But Vramin advances, and Madrak stares out the window, mumbling.

Then Anubis raises his staff before him.

"Angel of the Seventh Station, and fallen, depart!" says Anubis.

"You use my old title," says Vramin. "I am now Angel of the House of the Dead."

"You lie."

"No. By appointment of the Prince do I now occupy your former position."

With a great wrenching movement, Set frees his right hand.

Vramin dandles Isis's pendant before him, and Anubis backs away.

"Madrak, I bid you destroy this one!" he cries out.

"Vramin?" says Madrak. "Oh, no, not Vramin. He is good. He is my friend."

Set frees his right ankle.

"Madrak, if you will not destroy Vramin, then hold Set!"

"'Thou Who might be our Father who perhaps may be in Heaven. . . .'" Madrak intones.

Then Anubis snarls and points his staff like a bazooka at Vramin.

"Come no further," he announces.

But Vramin advances another step.

A blaze of light falls upon him, but the red beams from the pendant cancel it out.

"Too late, dog," he says.

Anubis circles, draws near the port where Madrak stands.

Set frees his left ankle, rubs it, stands.

"You are dead," says Set, and moves forward.

But at this moment, Anubis falls to the knife of Madrak, which enters his neck above the collar bone.

"I meant no harm," says Madrak, "and this is to pay in part for my guilt. The dog led me astray. I repent. I make you a gift of his life."

"Thou fool!" says Vramin. "I wanted him prisoner."

Madrak begins to weep.

Anubis bleeds in red spurts upon the floor of the cockleshell.

Set lowers his head slowly and rubs his eyes.

"What shall we do now?" asks Vramin.

"'Hallowed be Thy name, if a name Thou hast and any desire to see it hallowed . . .'" says Madrak.

Set does not answer, having closed his eyes and fallen into a sleep that will last for many days.

VI

The Citadel of Marachek, empty, not empty, empty again. Why? Listen. . . .

Set stands his ground, facing the monster, and it lunges toward him.

For a long while they wrestle, there in the courtyard.

Then Set breaks its back, and it lies a-groaning.

Then Thoth, his son, his father, the Prince Who Was A Thousand, opens again the bottle of instant monsters and removes another seed.

Sowing it there in the dust, another menace blooms beneath his hand, then bends toward Set.

The madness that lies within Set's eyes falls upon the creature, and there is more conflict.

Standing above its broken body, Set bows his head and vanishes.

But Thoth follows after him sowing monsters, and the ghosts of Set and the monsters he fights rage through the marble memory that is wrecked and rebuilt Marachek.



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And each time that Set destroys a creature, he turns his eyes once again toward a place, a moment, where he had battled the Nameless and destroyed a world and where the dark horse shadow his son rears and blazes; and heeding the beck of annihilation he moves toward that place, that moment. But Thoth follows, distracting him with monsters.

This is because Set is destruction, and he will destroy himself if there is nothing else that is suitable at hand or somewhere in sight, in time or in space. But the Prince is wise and realizes this. This is why he follows after his father on his temporal journey toward the altar of annihilation, after his awakening from the trance of battle against the Thing That Cries In The Night. For Thoth knows that if he can distract him long enough from his pilgrimage, new things will arise toward which Set's hand may be turned. This is because such things always arise.

But now they move through time, filling perhaps all of time, considered from this moment of it — the wise Prince and his deadly father/son — skirting always the Abyss that is Skagganauk, son, brother and grandson.

This is why the ghosts of Set and the monsters he fights rage through the marble memory that is wrecked and rebuilt Marachek, the oldest city.

END



Dear Editor:

Isaac Asimov's *The Holmes-Ginsbook Device* (Dec. *If*) was a darn funny story, which makes me wish that the Good Doctor would do more writing, other than science-popularization. But, on the first page of the story, the narrator says, "Mike Ginsbook was born on Jan. 1, 2001, which made him exactly as old as this century." I beg to differ with Dr. Asimov, but if Ginsbook had indeed been born on the 1st of January, in 2001, he would be exactly one year less than the age of that century (i.e., in 2035 Ginsbook would be 34 years old.) So he must have been born Jan. 1, 2000.

Was that a typographical error, or did My Hero goof?

Mack Reynolds's serial *The Computer Conspiracy* was a very good novel. But I am puzzled about one thing. I am damn sure that this story is the latest in a (more or less) series about such things as Inalienable Basic, teevee wrist phones and the wilds of Brooklin (or is it Manhattan?) which all seem to stem from an *If* First by the name of *Bircher*, that was published a year or so ago.

But Mack Reynolds (I am fairly sure) has been around a lot longer than a year or two. Where did I go wrong? Did my memory circuits blow a gasket or what?

Two final questions: Whatever happened to the *If* policy of overlapping serials (I miss them)? And whatever happened to the novels by Robert Heinlein you used to print every now and then (I miss them too)?

If *If* continues to be such a fine magazine, it will make a clean sweep of the Hugo field for FOUR straight years (at least as long as MY vote has anything to say about it.—)!!!—James A. Juracic, P O Box 11, Fruitvale, B.C., Canada.

● No goof. Figure it for yourself. There was no Year Zero, so January 1st of the year 1 was the first day of the first century; January 1st of the year 2001 will be the first day of the twenty-first century; and so on through the ages. Asimov make a mistake? You must be kidding!

About Mack Reynolds: Yes, he's been around quite a while, and isn't the author of *Bircher* — different

story, different writer. Heinlein: He's still building his super-house, but signs are he may soon be getting back to novels — at which time we hope to get back to bringing them to you. Overlapping serials: We stopped overlapping them because we couldn't find enough good serials to keep it up. Writers move in cycles, like lemmings. It looks like the migration is toward good serials again, so maybe we'll be able to overlap them again before long. — *Editor*.

* * *

Dear Editor:

1) Before all else, let me add my congratulations to the multitude's on the occasion of the award to *Worlds of If* of the Hugo for the third consecutive year! This honey of praise should sweeten the gullet before the gall of stricture, here following, is sipped. Look not behind you to see of the pursuit, nor linger to bask in favor's warmth, for, know that always the competitions' choppers gnash at your heels. A pseudo-archaic touch of Howard or Edison Marshall may well lubricate the accompanying rude shaft of criticism.

2) While this writer does, in truth, admire your successful eclecticism as editor in selecting (and, no doubt, amending) the contents of *Worlds of If*, the mechanical and substantiative aspects of the magazine apparently have not had your full attention. ITEM: 1) In the December, 1968 issue (not even read in full as yet) mechanical errors abound typographically as evinced on pages 81, 82, and 83 to exhaust not the list. As for substantiation, ITEM: 2) In the fast-paced, thought-pro-

voking and well-enjoyed serial *The Computer Conspiracy*, its author Mack Reynolds, an omnivorous autodidact by all the signs, states most inaccurately on page 126 that the Esperanto phrase *venu rapide* means (page 127) *kill him*. Not so. The significance of these two words is *come quickly*; to achieve the desired merely shout *lin mortigu!* ITEM: 3) On page 133 Reynolds asserts incorrectly that Hungarian's sole linguistic relative in Europe is Finnish. Not so. Not affluent perhaps, but an indubitable relative (cognate, even, to Finnish) is Estonian. And some would add, as second cousin perhaps, Turkish which retains a small but definite toehold in Europe. All these last could have been precluded by an alert researcher through a phone call or three to some knowledgeable source right there in mighty, if slowly decomposing, New York. Now, it is not suggested that in addition to your other duties you assume directly those of proofreader and researcher (but then, why not?!); however, as editor, you are responsible for all literary material appearing in your magazine, and therefore you should exercise a firmer control over its appearance and content — as a matter of your editorial reputation, if nothing else, don't you agree?

3) Alas, in most laurel wreaths are concealed a few thorns. If moved thereto, hopefully a few more of the former could appear in the future from your scabrous, but loyal subscriber — R. C. Marble, P O Box 545, Reseda, California 91335. ● *Mea culpa*, Esteemed Subscriber. Typographical vicissitudes (and auc-

terial misdemeanors) inevitably rebound discredibly to redactive reputations. Yet *pari passu*, what is one to do when previously normative parameters enter a heteroscedastic phase? —Editor.

* * *

Dear Editor:

"Science-fiction," it says here on the cover of *If*. So what's *Creatures of Light*, a fantasy by Roger Zelazny, doing here? I don't like fantasy. Like religion, it is the product of human imagination with no basis in fact. That's where religion came from. If I want to read fantasy I'll read the Bible. — Roger Frohn.

* * *

Dear Editor:

Mack Reynolds, an entertaining author and constructor of ingenious tales, needs some editorial assistance.

He is obsessed with the idea that proper development of his characters requires "Cuteness" and a slang to which he tries to impute currency: zoroaster, trunk, wizard, chum-pal, funker, whistlin Dixie, lush, guzzle, dill. Some are his and some are borrowed, and none are good.

If he must use such blunt tools, he should at least research them to the extent of observing their shortness of span in real life.

Can't you help him? and me? — W. F. Poynter, 1200 Monterey Boulevard, San Francisco, California 94127.

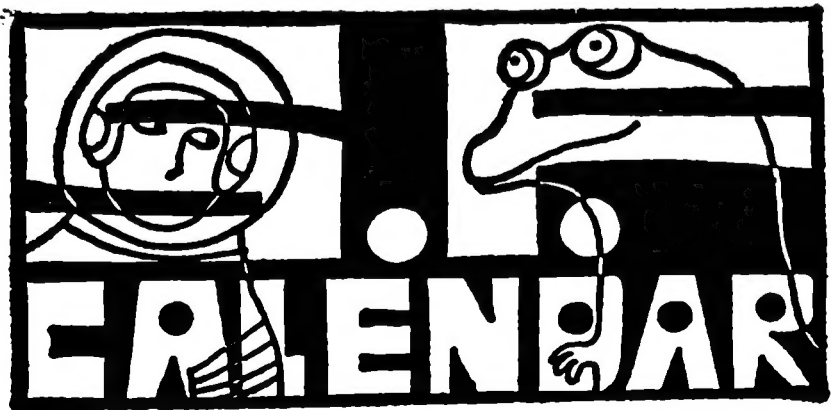
* * *

Dear Editor:

Since you read all the stories submitted and decide which stories are to be published (as you state in *Hue & Cry*) exactly what do the Managing and Associate Editors do? I had always thought that they screened the stories first and sent the best to you for final selection.

I bought *Worlds of Fantasy*. It's excellent. More, please! — Fred F. Jackson III, 289 Dellwood, Pontiac, Michigan 48053.

● What do they do? Why they do all the hard work, of course —proof-reading, manuscript editing, dealing with artists, etc., while The Editor lounges at his ease, eating chocolates and reading stories. *R.H.I.P.* — Editor.



March 1, 1969. First Annual Conference on the "Bibliography of Science Fiction," sponsored by the Fantasy and

Science Fiction Society of Columbia University. At the Harkness Theater, Butler Library, Columbia University, New York City, from 1:00-5:00 P.M. There will be an exhibition of bibliographical and scholarly works on science fiction. The program will include presentations by librarians, bibliographers, collectors, etc. For information: Fred Lerner, 98-B, The Boulevard, East Paterson, New Jersey 07407.

March 2, 1969. ESFA Annual Open Meeting. At YM-YWCA, 600 Broad Street, Newark, New Jersey 07104. Gen-

eral theme: "Looking Backward: 1969-1939," Changes in the SF Field in the Last Thirty Years. Admission: \$1.25. For Information: Allen Howard, 157 Grafton Avenue, Newark, New Jersey 07104.

March 22-23, 1969. BOSKONE VI. At the Statler-Hilton, Boston, Massachusetts. Guest of Honor: Jack Gaughan. Membership \$2.00. For information: New England Science Fiction Association, Box G, MIT Branch Station, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139.

March 29-30, 1969. MARCON. At the Holiday East Motel, Columbus, Ohio 43227. Guest of Honor: Terry Carr. Features: Panel Discussions, Open Party, Banquet. Registration fee: \$2.00. Banquet Ticket: \$5.00. For information: Bob Hillis, 1290 Byron Avenue, Columbus, Ohio 43227.

April 4-6, 1969. MINICON TWO. At the Hotel Andrews, 4th Street at Hennepin, Minneapolis, Minnesota. Guests of Honor: Charles V. De Vet, Gordon R. Dickson, Carl Jacobi, Clifford D. Simak. Membership: \$2.00 — register now and receive two progress reports. For information: Jim Young, 1948 Ulysses Street. Make checks or money-orders payable to Mrs. Margaret Lessinger.

N.E., Minneapolis, Minnesota 55418.

April 4-6, 1969. BRITISH SCIENCE FICTION CONVENTION. At Randolph Hotel, Oxford, England. Guest of Honor: Judith Merril. For information in the USA: Sam Russell, 1351 Tremaine Avenue, Los Angeles, California 90019.

April 11-13, 1969. LUNACON. Guest of Honor: Robert (Doc) A. W. Lowndes. At the Hotel McAlpin, New York City. Advance membership \$2.00, or \$2.50 at the door. Two Progress Reports will be sent to members. For information: Franklin M. Dietz, 1750 Walton Avenue, Bronx, New York 10453.

May 9-11, 1969. DISCLAVE. At Skyline Inn, South Capitol and I Street, S.W. Washington D.C. Guest of Honor: Lester del Rey. Membership: \$1.50, in advance; \$2.00, at the door. For information: Jay Haldeman, 1244 Woodbourne Avenue, Baltimore, Maryland 21212.

June 6-8, 1969. PgHLANGE (Pittsburgh regional convention). At Allegheny

Motor Inn, 1424 Beerschool Road, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Guest of Honor: Robert Silverberg. Features a banquet. Membership: \$1.50, in advance, \$2.00, at the door. For information: 1421 Wightman, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15217.

June 23-August 1, 1969. THE SECOND ANNUAL CLARION WRITERS' WORKSHOP IN SPECULATIVE FICTION. Participants may register for two, four or six weeks, and college credit may be granted. Faculty: Robin Scott, Frederik Pohl, Fritz Leiber, Harlan Ellison, Damon Knight and Kate Wilhelm. The cost is \$88.00 for each two-week segment and includes full room and board. For information: Robin Scott Wilson, English Department, Clarion State College, Clarion Pennsylvania 16214.

June 28-30, 1969, MIDWESTCON. At The North Plaza Motel, 7911 Reading Road, Cincinnati, Ohio. For reservation blanks and information: Lou Tabakow, 3953 St. Johns Terrace, Cincinnati, Ohio 45236.

July 3-6, 1969 WESTERCON XXII/FUNCON II. At Miramar Hotel, Santa Monica, California. Guest of Honor: Randall Garrett. Fan Guest of Honor: Roy Tackett, Toastmaster: Harlan Ellison. Membership: \$3.00 in advance, \$5.00 at the door. A supporting membership of \$1.00 entitles you to all publications. For information: FUNCON II, Box 1, Santa Monica, California 90406. Make checks payable to Ken Rudolph.

August 29- September 1, 1969. ST. LOUISCON: 27th World Science Fiction Convention. At Chase-Park Plaza Hotel, 212 N. Kingshighway, St. Louis, Missouri 63108. Guest of Honor: Jack Gaughan. Fan Guest of Honor: Ted White. Features: Project Art Show; Masquerade Ball; All-night movies — every night; Rock Band; Panels and speeches featuring all your favorite writers, editors, and artists; Auctions; Awards Banquet and the Presentation of the Hugos. Memberships: \$4.00, attending; \$3.00, supporting. Join now and receive all the progress reports as they are published. For information: St. Louiscon, P.O. Box 3008, St. Louis, Missouri 63130. Make checks payable to St. Louiscon.

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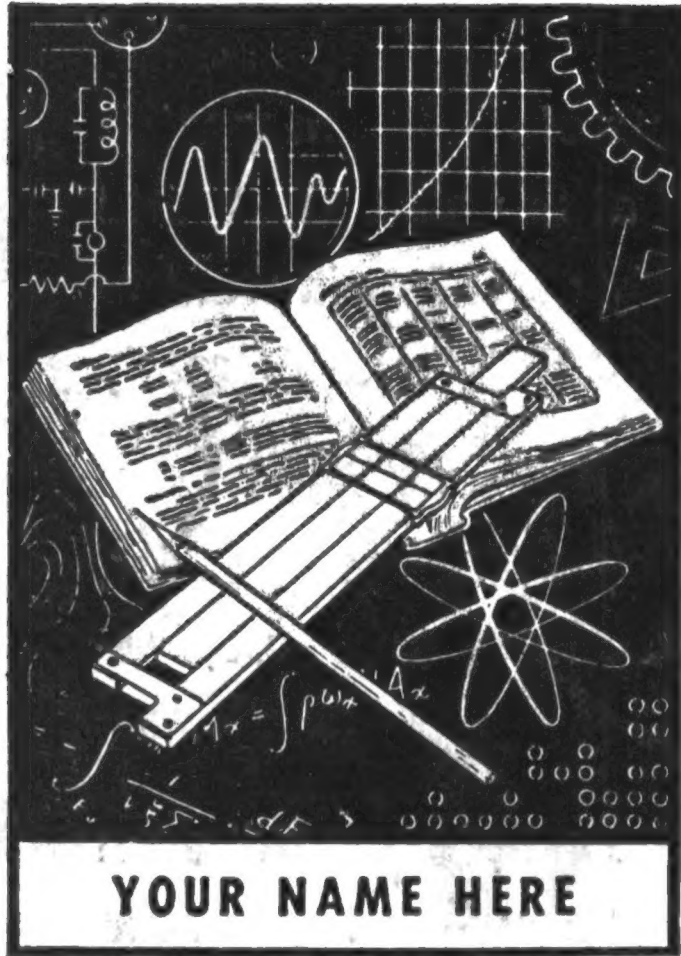
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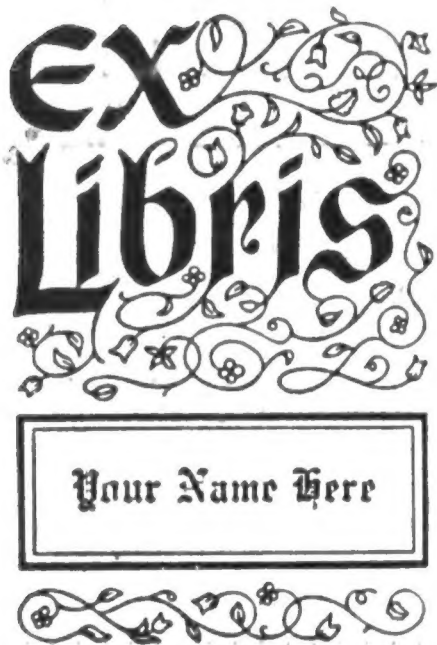
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